Apostolic Foundations

The Challenge of Living an Authentic Christian Life

by Art Katz

Publisher **:** Burning Bush Publications (June 6, 2000)
ISBN-10 **:** 9810424817
ISBN-13 **:** 978-9810424817
www.artkatzministries.org

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Preface

I have a very special respect for the word *apostolic*. To lose its meaning threatens the loss of the faith itself. It is not a word that is easy to define, and yet there is something about this word and its meaning that is at the heart of the faith. It is an ultimate word, and it is a word that needs to be resuscitated, and not be thought of as merely a denominational identification. It is a word that pulsates with glory, and therefore we need to seek for and rescue the apostolic foundation—or we will not have a church worthy of that word.

Like every great biblical word, we will not find the definition in a dictionary. We need rather to be *apprehended* by the genius of what that word represents. It is a seeking out and restoring of all that was once authentic, all that was held dear, all that was believed, all that was understood, and all that was vital in the first church. There is something pungent about the word *apostolic* that brings to mind the heart, the spirit and the sense of the church when it was at its glory. The church was apostolic at its inception and needs to be so at its *conclusion*. Indeed, only an apostolic church can stand and overcome, and by that witness, testify to and penetrate an obdurate and resistant remnant of Israel in the mystery of God at the end of this age.

Probably one of the greatest failures of the church is to be satisfied with verbal statements and credal affirmations— but without the corresponding actuality. We are deceived, and we will be deceiving others if we satisfy ourselves with mere verbal acknowledgments alone. God is existential—He is the God of reality; He is not content with the mere approval of a doctrine. He waits for the appropriation and the reality.

A church with apostolic foundations is that body of people whose central impulse and principle of life, being and service is *one thing only*, namely, a radical and total jealousy for the glory of God. May these great apostolic themes kindle in your own hearts nothing less or other than this holy standard. And may something come into your spirit and the marrow of your being that henceforth will never let you go.

Be assured that the insights expressed here have not come cheaply nor glibly, but by conditions of life, experienced corporately and personally, that approximate in some measure the realities that constituted the grit of the early church. To those who have suffered with us these pains in the hope of the glory is this book dedicated.

Arthur Katz

Introduction

There is no word that should be more alive in our consciousness than the word *apostolic*. It is a word that says everything about the nature and the genius of the church, and all that God expects from it, and intends for it. Like all other great biblical words, we cannot find a definition for them by reaching for a dictionary. It is a word that we need to apprehend and be apprehended by. It is a word that has fallen into disuse and needs to be restored, and that restoration is not going to be cheap—but it is worth *everything*.

Nothing of any eternal consequence or immediate value can be effected in the earth independent of it. I have maybe a slight patience for what is called para-church ministries and interim things that have been raised up in our generation for the lack of a church of this kind. At best they are only God's temporary provision. His true works, however, must emanate from a true church, and a church of a particular kind, as was laid forth in the church at Antioch (Acts 13). God is jealous over the word *apostolic*. The Lord designates Himself as the "High Priest and Apostle" of our confession. If the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, then we need to appropriate the depths of the meaning of that word in order that we might be part of what makes that up, and the configuration of things apostolic that makes the church the church.

The Greek root of the word apostolic is 'apostolos' which means 'sent one.' That which is not sent of God cannot accomplish the purposes of God, and that which He sends He empowers, and we are going to examine the anatomy of sending from the account of the commissioning and sending of Moses out of the burning bush. This sending by God is timeless in all of the profound principles of God that have to do with sending, and therefore, with that which has to do with apostolic.

> Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
>
> And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.
>
> So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up."
>
> When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."
>
> Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

> He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.
>
> And the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.
>
> So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.
>
> And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me; furthermore, I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians are oppressing them.
>
> Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."
>
> But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"
>
> And He said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain."
>
> Then Moses said to God, "Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?"
>
> And God said to Moses, "i am who i am"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘i am has sent me to you.’"
>
> And God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations." (Exodus 3:1–15)

The word *sent* is used five times. There are some principles here that have an eternal validity and an abiding application, giving us an insight into the one whom God sends. For example, why did this take place where it did on the backside (west side) of the desert, and why was there a forty-year preparation in the wilderness that preceded it? Why did God wait for Moses to turn aside and see before He called Him? What if he had not turned? When God *saw* that Moses turned aside to see, it was only then that He called

to him out of the midst of the burning bush. This turning aside to see is the pivotal and critical turning point. So much was hanging on a single moment's obedience, a single moment's freely rendered act that could not be compelled. God did not tell Moses to turn aside to see, but something out of the man himself was critical, and if God does not find that in us, then we can forget any kind of apostolic commissioning, sending, or doing.

Is there a parallel between the commissioning of Paul and the commissioning of Moses? They were two great master-builders, two men who were key to the purposes of God to bring a people up and out of slavery and into a land flowing with milk and honey. It is not enough to deliver *out* but also to bring *in*. It is not just the rescuing of a people from the Egyptians, but also an ultimate confrontation with Pharaoh. This was a Moses who had forty years earlier sought out of his own self-initiated conduct to do 'good' to his people. But it eventuated in the death of one Egyptian, hastily buried in the sand, and Moses was required to flee into the wilderness. Forty years later, the moment of encounter came, and the true fulfillment of his calling.

To what degree, therefore, must failure precede a true appropriation of one's calling? It was true for Paul and Moses, and needs to be for us. Are we willing for the humiliation of failure, allowed and established by God Himself, despite our best well-meaning intentions? It is only out of the debris and death of *that* failure, and the mortification of it, that a man can be formed whom God can send. Can a man be formed in any other way? There is something about failure, especially when it is born out of the best well-meaning intentions to serve God, that does the depth of work in the human soul like nothing else can. The fact that we have not experienced failure is a statement that we have neither sought, nor had apostolic intention. We have timidly played it 'close to the vest.' We avoid the humiliation of failure and seek rather to 'get by.'

There was a largesse of soul that was to be seen in both Paul and Moses, and it is this largesse that was not satisfied, but had its birth out of the intensity of the heart for God. When God finds such a one as that, even in his own error, then there is more potential for him than those who purport to be His friends, who have not that intensity, but who would rather drift along, and whose lives are lackluster and undistinguished for God. Peter failed dismally, but out of that great failure came a great apostle.

> Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.
>
> So he looked this way and that, and when he saw that there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exodus 2:11–12)

Though Moses was called of God, he was not yet qualified to be a deliverer. He lacked the fear of God, and the awareness of God. His whole posture was horizontal: *He* saw and *he* acted, but there is no consideration of looking up. Merely because we see something that needs to be rectified is not the justification for doing it. There is nothing more

opposed to the purposes of God than the well-meaning intentions men perpetrate in their own human and religious zeal.

There is something about the whole structure of church life, and the necessity to perform something to justify its existence and its perpetuation, that compels it to act without waiting. There is no greater death than waiting, which is at the very heart of priestliness. Priests did not commence their priestly activity, or ministry, until seven days of waiting were fulfilled. Seven is the number of completion, and the completion was the final death of their well-meaning intentions to do for God. Until *that* dies, there is no true priestly service, and if it is not priestly, then it is not apostolic. Jesus is the High Priest and Apostle of our confession. The first must precede the last. Impatience, self-will, religious ambition, the necessity to do and to be seen doing, to be recognized and acknowledged is *death* to the purposes of God.

When a church is impatient to perform and to do (how else does it justify itself?), and if it is not doing or performing, and not having a program, how do they pacify the congregation? Why should they continue to come? They are *required*, therefore, to implement programs in order to draw and keep the people.

In his eightieth year, when God confronts Moses at the burning bush and sends him, what does Moses say about that, *"Who am I that You should send me?"* He is a broken man, one who has no assurance of his qualifications. He has been completely emptied out of all of his human qualifications, which were supreme and sublime, both genealogically, being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the priestly tribe, and also a prince of Egypt, and therefore versed in all of their wisdom and knowledge. But this is now a man truly emptied of himself and has not a wit of confidence that he can perform anything, let alone deliver an entire people out of bondage. There is no man more qualified than the one who believes in his deepest heart that he is without qualification. The whole preliminary work of God is to disqualify us before we can be qualified. This is totally contrary to the whole religious mindset. It is absolutely wasteful in their eyes because here is a man, who at the age of forty and full of vigor, is ready to do great things for God. How many of us are itching to go out and make our mark for God? And yet God does not think it lavish, wasteful or extravagant to give Moses another forty years of waiting in the wilderness until he is completely emptied out—and *then* He calls him.

Merely because we see something that deserves to be rectified is not a justification necessarily to perform it. We *cannot* act in response to need. Moses is not sent because *he* sees the need, but it says that, *"the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me."* God saw their affliction, and we are not to go on the basis of our seeing, but on the basis of His sending. What a difference that is from all the running ‘here and there’ that is currently taking place in Christendom!

While God waited for Moses an additional forty years, Israel continued to be afflicted an additional forty years, and God did not count that as being wasteful, or extravagant. He allowed an entire nation to suffer for yet another generation, waiting for the moment chosen by God for His own divine action. This is not only a revelation of the man, but

also a revelation of the God who calls and sends the man. Do we know that God in *that* way? Until we do, then how shall we be sent, for how will we represent Him and make Him known if we do not know Him as He is? An apostle is sent in the place of another. He is representing God—not his thought about Him—but who He in fact is in Himself. That is an expensive knowledge when one considers the amount of suffering that took place in the waiting, and yet God allowed it. Human nature is expedient and utilitarian, and wants to get it done *now*. But our way is not His way, nor are our thoughts His thoughts. The church operates more out of the temper of modern things than out of the timeless and eternal God, who has a far different view about suffering than we.

Right now we are centering in on the root of apostolic character and the knowledge of God. God will not send someone who is half-baked in the understanding of Himself. What is that person going to convey? What does an apostle bring when he comes? Why is the apostle the foundation of the church? The single distinctive characteristic or trait of an apostle that makes him foundational to the church is the knowledge of God as He is in Himself, and not as we think Him to be. That knowledge is not cheap, but takes years to obtain at the hand of God through trials, suffering and failures that are permitted through humiliations and defeats. If we have subscribed to some easy, intellectual understanding of God, and have not wrestled with the righteousness of God, the judgments of God, and why He allows suffering, then we will *not* be sent. We need rather to burrow in to understand the enigma of God, and not to be satisfied with mere credal statements. God loves men like that who will wrestle with Him. Many of us are not been sent because we have not wrestled. We are satisfied with a patsy notion of God, which may be technically correct, but is not in fact true.

We may know something, and be called to something, or have a revelation of something, but it is not yet the moment of God's time to express it. Can we patiently hold it until that time? Why then does God give the calling and then call for it at a much later time? Why put the man through all kinds of inward struggles and wrestling? Why does he not give the calling and fulfillment right at the same time? What is served by giving a calling way in advance, and then requiring it at a much later time? Why does God allow it? What takes place existentially and inwardly that somehow serves the purposes of God? Is it a coincidence that Moses is *forty* years on the backside of the desert? Forty signifies trial and testing. We need to respect the extraordinary preparation of a man for service, because if we do not respect it in Moses, then we will not respect it in ourselves. Will we be willing to submit to waiting and to conditions of trial and preparation for true service when the whole religious world clamors for action?

There is something in God's heart that is tenderly disposed to those who watch the flock by night, who are dutiful, faithful and unprepossessing. Shepherding sheep was the most disgraceful vocation in Egypt. There was nothing lower in Egyptian values than tending flocks, and for forty years that was all Moses did. There is something that is served in monotony and regularity, in something that is predictable, that has no variation, that lacks any kind of flamboyance or charismatic excitement, but requires a steadfast patience and faithful performance, day after day after day. If Moses had not done that, he would not have been qualified to bring the flock of God out of Egypt. The one was a necessary

preliminary to the other, and we need to serve our apprenticeship in the things that are ordinary, unseen and undistinguished, and show ourselves faithful in *that*, in order to be faithful in the other. This is the sublime wisdom and requirement of God. For Moses, it came out of circumstances, fleeing from Egypt, and finding himself in Midian and into an economy that had at its heart the tending of sheep. It was God's perfect and necessary preparation for a man who was a prince in Egypt.

Moses led the flock on the *backside* of the desert where the Mount of God is to be found—and *only* there. We can go to all our charismatic conferences and all of the renowned speakers for our 'great experiences in God,' and yet come back with ashes in our mouth, because we have not gone to the backside but the frontside. But the Mount of God is not located *there*. Horeb means 'dry, desiccated, barren and impoverished.' *That* is the Mount of God and it is *that* which He occupies. That is where God is to be found. Do we have a stomach to seek Him in that place? The backside is unsavory, unbecoming and unspectacular. The frontside is where the action is, being lush, and has all the glitter, the big stars, the names, and the activity. Who is going to seek the backside where the Mount of God is? Nothing has changed. Do we have a stomach for the backside, and can we be weaned away from the frontside with all of the four-color brochures that come in the mailbox?

All of this is preliminary qualification for the encounter with God and the sending. Mt. Horeb is a lowly kind of a nothing mount, which is not only where God is found, but also what God is in Himself. Why is He found there? It is for the very same reason that He was born in a stable, and has the inception of His kingdom with a man who dribbled in his beard (King David), and was joined by the indebted and disappointed. This is *God*, and if we do not know that, then what are we going to communicate. It is only this knowledge of God that brings men out of bondage. For after all, what is Egypt but the antithesis of the desert. Egypt is lush carnality and fleshly gratification. God is Horeb—dryness, arid, seeming disappointment, and nothing that tantalizes the flesh. He is the God of humility, and it is only the revelation of God's humility that can save men out of Egypt. The seemingly inferior thing is alone calculated to destroy the thing that seems to 'have all the marbles.' The weakness of God is greater than the strength of men, and the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of men. Egypt was the epitome of human wisdom and civilization, but Horeb is something entirely opposite.

The man that God reserves for ultimate use, ultimate deliverance, and ultimate confrontation, is not one who is going to deal with a few Egyptians, but very Pharaoh himself, in an ultimate demonstration. God hears the cry and sees the need, and we have to have a sublime confidence, not only in His compassion and mercy, but also in His sovereignty. That will save us from self-initiated activity and from becoming premature 'saviors' of the world.

> And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

> So Moses said, "I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Why did God choose a bush and not just reveal Himself as He did to Joshua in apparition form? Why does God reveal Himself in this context? What had this got to do with the particular and peculiar sending of Moses? How does that relate to the history of Moses? What does God want to impress on our minds by this kind of revelation of Himself? What is there in a burning bush that reveals God? Was Moses' turning aside to see his own voluntary act? Was it mere curiosity? With what kind of a looking did he look? What evoked this uttermost consecration of God, *"Here am I"* that we do not see in multitudes of God's charismatic and evangelical people? Until God has the whole man, lock, stock and barrel, *"Here am I,"* then there is no sending.

The extraordinary preparation of the apostolic man is only to be understood in the eternal perspective—not only in this age, but also in the ages to come. If we think that everything is in terms of Moses' call and God's purpose in the deliverance of Israel, however great those things are, then we have missed it. There is something more that we need to understand, or we will not be willing to submit patiently to the preparation of our character, namely, the eternal context. Our call is an eternal call, and our earthly service is only one aspect of that fulfillment. God sees everything in the eternal context, and we need to see that also. That is why forty and eighty years are nothing! It is a preparation for the ages to come, and this awareness has been totally lost to the modern church, to our own detriment.

Let us take the bush itself. Why did God use a mere *bush*? It is the most ordinary, scrubby thing that can be found. Should He not have been in the midst of a burning oak or some great towering massive tree that bespeaks the grandeur of God? What is it about a bush that God dwells in? It is the key to revealing apostolic character. When one will turn aside to see *that*, the God in *that* bush, then God calls. If we have not found God where he is most profoundly to be discovered, it is because we have not thought to find Him in the most unlikely and ordinary thing. There is a revelation of God that must be given in that place, or we cannot be sent. An apostle is a man who sees the grandeur of God in the ordinary place, and the ordinary circumstance. We tend to look for the impressive, but God is in the grit of daily life, in its failures, frustrations, and vexations. God is found right in the midst of the trials of our life, and if we have not thought to find Him there, we have not yet found Him in truth.

Moses turned aside to see, but many will pass that by, and that is why we have a whole history of broken marriages. Divorce is as endemic in the church as it is in the world. We pass it by; we throw it on the scrap heap for the failed thing it was. We do not turn aside to see; we have not burrowed into it; we have not examined it; we have not gotten into the entrails; we are not willing to invest ourselves into the gritty, sticky, pointed thing, which is the constituent element of all our life. We are looking for something large, magnificent, heroic, and dramatic, but God is not to be found in that place.

A church that languishes in its superficiality, looking for something outside of itself to spice up its services, will never find God. The things that make up the grit of its life is the very place that God abides and dwells. If we would look into that grit, and give ourselves to it, then we would find such unspeakable realms of meaning and significance—and very God Himself—in a depth that we would not otherwise have found. How can we be apostolic when we have not even examined the content of our own life and have passed and glossed over that? We love looking for end-time truth, but we neglect the grit of what we ourselves are made.

This turning aside, or turning back to look into what we would otherwise have dismissed as having been finished, is a key to our whole future use in God. In God's sight, *that which is past is now, and God requires that which is past.* That is the very thing, humanly speaking, we want to pass over. It is painful to look into our past. We do not want to remember things that have to do with failure, divorces, abortions, and lost friendships. When Moses turned aside to see, it was not out of curiosity, but to turn aside to see and ask *why* the bush was burning and was not consumed. That is apostolic turning, apostolic examination, and apostolic seeing. It was not mere human curiosity wanting to understand an aberration of nature. It is rather a man turning aside to get *into* something.

If we could but see by the eye of God, as He looks down upon the modern church, full of 'Amens' and 'Hallelujahs,' choruses, homilies, and biblical messages—all as an overlay to a people who are struggling inside, failing and bumbling—we would see a superficial haze and a religious gloss. The true spiritual thing is God's people in their condition in the reality of their life and situation—the very thing that is left undealt. The church will never be an apostolic reality until it turns back and sees, and deals with the grit of its life. Merely to adopt a new vocabulary of apostolicity is to compound the error. We have got enough raw materials and treasure in God's people in the ordinary constitution of their life, their circumstance, and their history, that if we would but examine it, and deal with it, it would be a key to apostolic glories.

When we will turn aside to see, we can say goodbye to our categories and convictions. We were all set up with our charismatic understanding, and New Testament convictions, but to turn aside to see means that something fundamental has turned, something has been wrenched, and there is, of necessity, no coming back. We need to be willing to take that risk. All of our security, religious and spiritual, all of the things that we have understood about the faith, or ourselves in the faith, might well be lost—and necessarily so. It is so wrenching an experience that who knows what the end of it will be. Unless we are willing to risk it, there is no calling, or sending. It is a radical opening of oneself to God for whatever He will reveal, even about ourselves.

God called Moses' name twice. In most instances through the Scriptures, men who are called twice are called to something *uttermost*. They are called to something ultimate and of great consequence that will require their all, possibly even their death. As absolute and as total as was God's call, so equally was Moses' answer, *"Here am I."* This is at the heart of *apostolic*, namely, no strings attached, no holds barred, no conditions, and no

questions. *That* is the holy ground—not its geographical location. The presence of God, the call of God, and the total response of the man make that ground holy.

There needs to be a transition from wherever we are, to this apostolic ground. If this book is anything, its one central theme is the call to this ground, and this foundation—the knowledge of God as He is, and desires to be made known.

Chapter 1 - Apostolic Service: Priestliness

The Mystery of Priesthood

Priesthood is at the heart of everything, and probably one of the most lamentable needs in modern Christianity is the absence of the sense of priestliness. If someone had asked me in my adolescence in Brooklyn, New York, as a troubled and perplexed kid, trying to make sense out of a bewildering universe, "What is your true vocation? What is it to which you think you are called?" I knew, even in my atheistic ignorance, that the real answer, if I had the courage to speak it, was, "Priest." Now I can understand better what my heart already knew about the centrality of priesthood.

We stand in a very peculiar danger of adopting yet another 'religious vocabulary.' In the same way that we have been inducted into the 'charismatic,' we can easily be inducted into an 'apostolic' form of speaking, and have yet another phraseology to which, in the end, we have just been rendered mere technicians. To take these holy and absolute things and make of them yet another weary, religious form is the most horrible of all fates. If we are going to be a vital church in word, deed and presence and one that is going to fulfill the eternal purposes of God, then something critical is required, namely, *the knowledge of the reality of God*. This is the only thing that will save us from being mere technicians. We are therefore commended to *consider* Jesus in Hebrews 3:1,

> Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

There is an inexorable connection between the *apostolic* and the *priestly*. There has been no neglect in our thinking of things apostolic, but there is a conspicuous lack of awareness of things priestly. We might attempt some fulfillment of other ministries and callings without the necessity of having a high-priestly center, although I doubt that, but there is something about apostolic that is eternally joined to the high-priestly. That which is expressed in the heavenly calling of Jesus, and indeed that which *makes* it heavenly, is, of necessity, part of our calling as well. Until God shall inspire and restore in us a true sense of priestliness, we will not be partaking in a calling that is heavenly. The word 'heavenly' does not refer to something spatial, but to a mindset, a mentality, or a mode of being. It is a particular character of something so hard to define, but when you encounter it, when something of it is wafted over you, or communicated to you, you *will* know it. If priestliness is just a fanciful designation that has a clouded meaning, then that means that *our* priestliness is equally as clouded. The world is destitute of the sense of things heavenly for the lack of priests who are able to bring that dimension of reality. In fact, another synonym for heaven is *reality*. Whatever reality is, then that is heaven. It takes even a priestly mentality to sense that, and to feel for that, and a priestly ministry to introduce that in a world that is inhospitable to heaven. Earth resists heavenly things, and yet mankind languishes for the lack of priests.

For a long time, I had considered the teaching on the priestly garments and nomenclature pertaining to priesthood to be quite dull. But I am now convinced that there is an eternal weight of glory in *all* the things that pertain to priesthood. Priestliness must both precede and accompany the apostolic walk. We urgently need God to breathe upon us the spirit of true priesthood, and to touch and transform every aspect of our lives, our walk, and our ministry. There is a requirement to minister unto God *before* one ministers to men. If we lack the sense of the sacredness of God, which is to be found only in the holy place, by those who have the posture of the priest, that is to say, prostrated as a dead man before Him, then there is going to be something brittle, something lacking, and something plastic in the ministry we bring. There is a cry of God for the restoration of priesthood that alone will save us from the superficial demonstrations that are ostensibly performed in His Name.

The Levitical Consecration

Leviticus Chapter 8 describes the consecration of the priests. As one reads it through, one cannot but sense the strange and antique ring about it. It seems so altogether remote from anything that can be considered modern, so that one is tempted to hurriedly pass over it as something rightfully buried in antiquity, and no longer having any claim upon our attention. That attitude is completely wrong, for *everything* in this chapter is profoundly relevant to our age; perhaps even more relevant to us now than it was for the Biblical generation to which it spoke.

It begins with these precious words: *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses …"* and follows on with, *"As the Lord commanded Moses … As the Lord commanded Moses … As the Lord commanded Moses."* Right from that beginning, God wants to rivet our minds to the Divine origin of all that is to follow. There is not a requirement given, not an ordinance in it, that could have had its origin in human contemplation. The whole concept is totally Divine and contrary to the flesh. It is a calculated attack upon human sensibility and good taste. It has its origin in the heart of God, and completely contradicts all that is human, and is, therefore, all the more valuable and revealing.

One experiences a certain sense of exhaustion just from the reading of this chapter. What then must have been the effect of actually participating in the fulfillment of all of these requirements of God? All of the cutting, the sprinkling of the blood, the wave offerings, and the sitting at the door of the tent of meeting are seemingly absurd and exhausting. By the time it was all finished, and those blood-bespattered men were waiting at the door of the tent of meeting, everything that seemed appealing and honorific to the flesh about the role and title of priest will have dimmed and paled. This will cure us from romantic notions of what ‘priestly’ means. It is full of blood, gore, and exhaustion. The details and requirements are so extraordinary.

> Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin

> offering, and the two rams and the basket of unleavened bread; and assemble all the congregation at the doorway of the tent of meeting." (Leviticus 8:1–3)

We need to take note that the people were required to observe the entire process as a living instruction. The statement of God to the whole congregation of Israel was not what the priests said, but what they did, and what was done to them, and for them. They had an advantage we do not have. We do not see animals being cut up, and the absurdity of catching the blood in basins and sprinkling it upon articles of furniture, and upon the clothing of the priests, and upon their ear, thumb and big toe. Something has got to happen to the one who is seeing this. Something has got to register upon his deepest consciousness about the meaning of sin, and what is required to expiate it. Someone had to stand between God and man, and death had somehow to be performed in order to obtain the life-giving thing, for the *life* is in the *blood*.

And so, if there is a New Testament priesthood, we will never really appreciate it in the depth that God intends unless we understand what preceded it and foreshadowed it. There are, therefore, certain essentials of priesthood itself that were given and described at the first, which are subsumed and brought into the New Testament, Melchizedek priesthood; it is not that the one has replaced the old. In a sense that is true, but it has also subsumed and taken into itself the deepest meanings given to priesthood at the very beginning.

> So Moses did just as the Lord commanded him. When the congregation was assembled at the doorway of the tent of meeting, Moses said to the congregation, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded to do." Then Moses had Aaron and his sons come near, and washed them with water. And he put the tunic upon him and girded him with the sash, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him; and he girded him with the artistic band on the ephod, with which he tied it to him. He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummin. (Leviticus 8:4–8)

How much are we willing to be stripped and washed in the water of the Word? How willing are we to endure the humiliation of nakedness before men, before even the first priestly garment can be put on? Moses washed Aaron and his sons *before* the garments were donned. It was a public humiliation, and all Israel was watching the preliminaries of their consecration. Humiliation is, therefore, at the heart of the meaning of the word priesthood. The garments were attached to the priests with skillfully woven cords. There was no quick on-and-off backstage costume change. Priesthood is not a role to be performed behind the pulpit, and then discarded upon returning home. It is not a calling that a man chooses because he thinks it is appealing. It is an exacting preparation, not entered into lightly, nor performed with indifference.

> He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Leviticus 8:9)

Aaron wore a golden plate that rested upon his forehead, and which registered its presence with every step he took. We would do well to sense that same golden shield on which were inscribed the words, *"Holiness unto God."* With every step and movement of our body, there would be impressed upon us, "Holiness unto God … Holiness unto God … Holiness unto God." You could not scratch yourself, nor could you make a gesture without it being pressed onto your head, *"Holiness unto the Lord."* We need to be reminded of this the whole time, because our head is always wanting opportunity, if we would grant it, to have its own excursions, its own delights, its own activities, and its own thoughts. The mind continually needs to be brought unto the knowledge of *"Holiness unto the Lord."* There would be much less brash and soulish ministry, and much less of a rush to come to the place of speaking, if that golden weight were resting squarely between our eyes. Let us feel again the heft of that weight with every step we take. Only then, and only after being thus clothed, and thus prepared, did the priest receive the anointing oil.

The Anointing Oil

> Moses then took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. (Leviticus 8:10)

If God required furniture to be anointed, then how much more does He require it for the vessels of flesh and blood, who really are His ministers? Do we rightly esteem the anointing of God? If ever a subject deserves examination, it is the phenomenon of anointing, and we need to have the deepest respect for it. Very expensive ingredients, tempered finely together, were required to make it up, and God commanded that it was not to be poured on man's flesh. There was also an *extreme* penalty for anyone who made anything like it. You do not dare concoct something that approximates to, or is the equivalent of, the holy anointing oil. The ingredients or spices used were usually associated with the anointing of a body for burial. They had a very particular fragrance, and were not to be employed for the things that have to do with the purposes of men, but God's only.

How many times have we been guilty of making our own oil? We can say much about fictitious anointing, things that seem to be like it, and are not, but are really more the effulgence of human personality. How many can distinguish between their own human personality and the holy anointing of God? There are so many 'hotshots' operating today who have the gift of the gab, and an executive ability, and know how to conduct and perform, but that is not the operation of the anointing at all. God will not force upon us the perfect if we are too satisfied with the substitute. When the man-made thing is spurned, and we rest wholly upon what *God* gives, then we are candidates to receive it. Every time we turn the amplifiers up, or give our voices a little soulish boost, and add a little razzmatazz in order to bring an effect, or give an invitation that we know is calculated to play upon the emotional responses of our hearers, then *that* is false

anointing. It is making something like it. It is not an absolute trust in the power of the anointing itself to obtain the consequences that God desires through His word.

Watchman Nee warned us in the 1920's that the deadliest deception of the Last Days was the soulish substitute for the realm of Spirit that would come through technology. We need to be both wary of it and guarded against it, lest we find ourselves depending upon soul power rather than Spirit power. We have done everything imaginable over the years to simulate the anointing of God, for example, by effecting pious tones, the amplification of sound, but the difference always shows. We know how to produce good services and preach good sermons, but we can never produce glory from heaven. We need to be careful, not only about technology, but also our own voice as a technological instrument employed with cunning to effect a certain response.

The Sacrifice

> And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. Then he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointing him, to consecrate him. Next Moses had Aaron's sons come near and clothed them with tunics, and girded them with sashes, and bound caps on them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering. Next Moses slaughtered it … (Leviticus 8:11–15a)

We need to understand what is implied in Moses' slaughtering the bull. It was a horrific phenomenon of bringing death that there might be life, and it was done before *the entire* congregation. They are watching the knife go in, and the blood spurt out. They watched the animal sag, totter and go down, and then be cut up. It was a vivid scene before them. The hacking up of the animals, while watching them jerk as their throats were being slit, was an act of utter foolishness, and there was nothing in the deed that could be explained by reason.

> … and took the blood and with his finger put some of it around on the horns of the altar, and purified the altar. Then he poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar and consecrated it, to make atonement for it. He also took all the fat that was on the entrails and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and their fat; and Moses offered it up in smoke on the altar. But the bull and its hide and its flesh and its refuse, he burned in the fire outside the camp, just as the Lord had commanded. (Leviticus 8:15b–17)

This is the opposite of what man would do, which shows how much heaven is antithetical to earthly reckoning and consideration. We would have saved the thing that God destroys, and the things that we would have cast aside as disgusting and worthless are the

very things that *God* calls the sacrifice. The flesh and the hide, which we would have savored as of great value, were burnt with the dung. They were not only to be burnt, but burnt outside the camp; such is God's disgust for flesh. What men esteem is an abomination in the sight of God.

The things that are a sweet savor to God are the inwards, the inner parts—not the outward things. God is not interested in the outer hide and the flesh; He counts that along with the dung. The inside, in the inner man, worked by Him in the hidden places, born of inward wrestling are the offerings of a sweet and pleasing savor before God. We have been guilty as contemporary Christians of offering our personalities, our winsomeness and our fleshly abilities to God, simply because we do not have the inward parts to offer, never having learned to rest or wait before God. We have despised the suffering, reproach and obscurity in which alone the sweet offerings are formed deep within us. We have not esteemed such things as God esteems them, and have preferred to do without them. We need the obedience and vision that will enable us to take our hide and flesh outside the camp, and to exclude it from the holy place, as well as from the pulpit.

You cannot tell where the priest ends and the sacrifice begins, for the priest and the sacrifice are one. And the priest that is a priest indeed, and who himself is a sacrifice, is one who has got 'fat,' an accumulation or residue, or the inward workings of God in the hidden place. He knows God in the hidden place behind the veil of circumstances and outward feelings. God has dealt with him in ways that cannot be explained to men, ways that are scandalous, and that men look upon as reproach, ways that leave one utterly alone to suffer and endure. They are humiliations, things that God has wrought in you in the stillness and the quiet, things that are calculated to bring you to Him. Few have opened themselves to God for *that* dealing in that inner place, where something can be built up of a sweet savor. Most of us are protective, and we do not allow God or anyone else into that place. We have protected ourselves from the suffering and pain of it, and therefore, our whole life is lived on the outside.

Identification

There was also an identification with the sacrifice, where Aaron and his sons would lay their hands on the heads of the animals. There is something inherent in priesthood in conferring by the laying on of hands, the symbolic identification with something that goes right into the apostolic thing. We see the same principle in Hebrews 2:17,

> Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

This corresponds exactly with Aaron and his sons laying their hands upon the animals. It is an identification with the thing that is sacrificed of something that needs to die as a substitute for the sin of man. The priest acknowledged his own sinfulness and the sins of the nation by the laying of the hands on that which is being offered as a substitute for them. It is the same as Job saying, *"I abhor myself and I repent in dust and ashes."* In other words, he was saying that he needed to go down into death, and that the only place for him, before a holy God, was as a dead man.

This principle of the laying on of hands actually confers something that has come from God, because you have already also identified as a priest with man in his sin, weakness and failings as Jesus Himself did. The whole grit of what it means to be man was the experience of Jesus—that total identification, not just by the laying on of hands, but by *being* it. This is not an academic consideration of the novelty and esoteric practices of Old Testament priesthood, but God rubbing our faces into the grit and reality of what must be attached to apostolic, namely, the priestly. The priestly is steeped in blood, gore and sacrifice, right up to our elbows—and you have to eat it!

Obedience

> Then he (Moses) presented the second ram, the ram of ordination; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And Moses slaughtered it and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. (Leviticus 8:22–23)

"*Hear*, O Israel!" is the beginning of all of the commandments of God. Hearing is obeying, and obeying is doing. From the ear to the hand, from the hearing to the doing, there must be an unhindered response. Until God has the whole of us in every kind of act, however much it contradicts our natural disposition, then He does not yet have a priest. Blood on the toe suggests Divine control over the direction of our lives. Until we are prepared to remain in those tedious and demanding situations in which God has placed us, then the blood of consecration is not upon our toe. Our 'goings' as well as our 'remainings' have got to proceed out of a death to everything other than the *word of the Lord*.

How many of us predicate our decisions on mere logic, rather than being led by the Spirit of the Living God? I am not opposed to logic or practicality, as long as it is God's logic and His practicality, and as long as it is not at the expense of hearing the voice of the Spirit. We are entirely capable of drawing reasonable conclusions about how this or that will aid in God's service, or how it will further His interests, without ever having heard from Him concerning His intentions. How many true works of God have been brought forth prematurely, or stillborn and dead, because something in us was still untouched by the blood of sacrifice? We cannot enter into the high, heavenly calling without the oil and the blood. We cannot meet its demands in our own self. We can only come in the power

of Another Life. When we have become discontent with everything less, when we have staggered and reeled before the demands of this calling, then we come to see that to enter into this priesthood, we must enter *into* the High Priest Himself. The book of Hebrews brings us to the reality of which the Levitical priesthood was but a type and a shadow. There is a higher order of priesthood, more sublime, more exalted and more demanding—the order of Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and peace.

Most of us have a rather glamorous notion of what a priest of God is; a notion derived from our own humanity, born of the earth instead of imparted from heaven. The carnality of our understanding is reflected in our discomfort over, and lack of comprehension of, these Levitical requirements. Sadly, it is reflected also in our conduct and ministry in God's house, where there is little evidence of the purging and consecration, the very thing which God requires to produce administration that is heavenly.

Waiting in Silence

After all of these sacrifices had been made for the consecration of the priests, there was yet one last thing,

> "At the doorway of the tent of meeting, moreover, you shall remain day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, that you may not die, for so I have been commanded." Thus Aaron and his sons did all the things which the Lord had commanded through Moses. (Leviticus 8:35–36)

There is something so human in us that is adept at producing schools of discipleship to process men in three months, and send them out to change the world. Where is the waiting? There is a human itch, where the last refuge of self hides, ostensibly in doing the work of God, but that corrupts it from being a pure and priestly work. It is not, and can never be, a work of eternal consequence. That final waiting somehow brings the death to *that last thing*. We are not to rush out and *do* our 'ministry.' There is a season of waiting that is an *ultimate* waiting. Seven is the number of completion. One can do a lot of 'good' things, but the ultimate things, the priestly things, the apostolic things, require waiting seven days at the door of the tent of the congregation. A lot of us have fallen short at this one place, and have allowed the cutting and shedding, but we have rushed out prematurely without first waiting for the last processes of God to take place.

The book of Acts, Chapter 13, commences with a group of people ministering unto the Lord. In that mode of being, the Holy Spirit could say, *"Set apart for Me Barnabbas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* These men were set apart, or consecrated, in a separation of such an ultimate kind that they would have been just as content to remain in the place of worship at Antioch as to be sent *into* the purposes of God. They had come to a place of death to themselves, even the religious desire to serve God, and to see fruit, and to be used, that it was all the same to remain as to go. It was a separation

from the deepest and most subtle elements of ambition that hide themselves in the last place in which they can find refuge, namely, a religious and spiritual ambition to *do* for God.

God has said that we will 'die' if we go before the time, and untold numbers have done that, and died—a short spurt, a little flurry of activity and recognition, and then lost to obscurity. The seven days of waiting is the final death to that last impulse to *do* for God, and to be *found* doing. When we have passed those seven days, then we are safe to minister in a priestly way for God, free from any consideration of the effect and benefit for ourselves. If there is something in us that wants to be heard, then our service is not priestly. We are a generation that is so ministry-minded, so doing-oriented that we have no concept for, and no disposition to see, the extraordinary investment that God requires in the preparation of His servants. God sets His premium on what we *are*, not what we do. If the *doing* does not flow from the *being*, then it is not apostolic.

The church at large more or less sees priestly service as little more than a performance for which they are paying, and so they are getting just what they are paying for: cheap, shallow, unheavenly services. They may be scripturally correct, but they are unable to transform life. People have not been brought to a heavenly place. The aura of heavenliness, and the fragrance that is about the Throne have not been breathed because we have not been disposed to wait before God in silence. Even Sunday services have been so structured for the optimum convenience of men, sufficient to allow us a time to sleep in, and to get it over with, and yet not too much so as to ruin the day. We leave a sufficient leisure available for the football game, or whatever our good pleasure is. We need to see modern Christianity as the religion of convenience, contrary to the whole priestly demeanor. We become easily distracted, edgy, itchy and impatient. We reflect the spirit and temper of the world by our inability to wait in silence.

It is not a man, or a bull, but we who are being laid on the altar. In waiting, every fleshly thing, every human contrivance and device, every desire to perform and win some glory for ourselves, every lazy, fearful tendency to take the easy and cheap way out, rises to the surface. It is a kind of mind battle when one really sets oneself to wait. Thoughts come to mind of the things that need to be done and how the time should really be employed. To be able to dismiss that, and bring our minds to a place of rest in God, free from distracting thoughts, is no small thing. We are not going to come to that readily, but through a process of time and experience in waiting, in order to bring our minds into subjection to Christ, and not allow ourselves to be influenced by every stray thought.

All this needs to be brought to the altar, to be hacked and cut up, and the lifeblood allowed to spurt out until it dies there, a spiritual sacrifice before God. There is really no mystery as to why we care so little to wait upon God. We have even less inclination for the making of this sort of sacrifice than we have for the butchery required of the Levites. We find such spiritual 'blood-letting' repugnant, such self-revelation too embarrassing and painful. We are too offended by such a requirement, too ready to deem it absurd, outdated, unloving, and wasteful.

The disciples once asked Jesus, "To what purpose is this waste?" They were referring to the woman who smashed the expensive alabaster box, and Jesus told them not to bother her for she had done a good work. It was the only time in the gospels that Jesus ever acknowledged anything done by man as being a good work. Her work was not only good, but wheresoever the gospel was going to be proclaimed in the world, that which the woman had done would be spoken of as a memorial to her. It was an extravagant acknowledgment of the uniqueness of what she had performed. Yet the very same act in the sight of the disciples moved them to indignation *at the waste*.

Waiting is not entered into in the hope of some breakthrough. Rather, God is God, and He deserves that acknowledgment. We are not to wait expecting some consequence to our waiting, because waiting that has strings attached, even spiritual strings attached, and that hopes for blessing, is not true priestly waiting. Waiting is only waiting when we ask nothing, desire nothing, and expect nothing. We make no claims, we are not requiring, we are His creation and He is the Creator. *That* is priestliness.

The needs are everywhere about us, crying out for our attention. Only a priestly ‘Son of God’ could have waited two days longer where He (Jesus) was on hearing that His friend Lazarus, whom He loved, was sick unto death. This is the heart of true priestliness. There was no deferring to the flesh, sentiment, and human need or to the expectation of men, but to the Father alone. True waiting is a sweeter smelling savor to the Lord than even the sacrifice and the burning, all the more when one has to suffer the reproach for it by those who are activists and say to you, "Well, what are you doing?" And you cannot answer them a word!

In our doing for God, it is possible to be secretly, or even unconsciously, obtaining something for ourselves that therefore dismisses it from being priestly. Pure priestly ministry does not bring to the minister anything for himself. It is totally and exclusively *unto God*. Paul often writes, *"For your sake"* and *"For God’s sake"* but never for Paul’s sake. Paul is an example of New Testament priestliness, and he would not, therefore, withhold bringing the whole purpose and counsel of God. He did not consider whether it would be approved, whether men liked it, how they would react, or even whether it was appropriate. A priest is utterly selfless, not having any regard for himself.

It is costly, but ultimately glorious, to wait the full seven days upon God. We need to come to this priestly place, and the reality of it, having known such waiting. Should God require action or activity, then it must always flow out of the place of waiting. Waiting has become so structured into the priestly life, that even the acts of God that issue from us, when they are required, still come out of that rest. I am persuaded that the greatest exploits of the Last Days will come out of the rest of God, from those who know that rest, and who, by the wastefulness of finding time for it, make it a habitual aspect of their priestly life.

Waiting inaugurates the priestly ministry, but it is not the end of it. Waiting needs to be characteristic of our whole mind-set and disposition before God, not only for the time of ministry, but even in the process of ministry. Can you believe that one can be waiting,

even in the midst of speaking? While you are speaking, you are waiting on God for the next statement. It is a remarkable disposition of an inward kind, even while one is active. This kind of waiting is virtually unknown to modern consideration, but needs to be restored. There is a conjunction between the willingness and the ability to be unseen and unheard, and to wait, that has everything to do with the power, the glory and the authority that is exhibited when we are called to be employed. One never knows when that calling will come, or even if it will come, but one has got to come to a priestly place where it makes no difference. To wait on God silently is as much to render Him priestly service as to go and speak, and only priestly service is effectual service.

This human thing, this taint that finds expression in witness and ministry, however compatible it might be with 'good' meetings, prevents and forestalls the experience of the glory of God falling in fire from heaven. Being jealous for the glory of God, and the fire from heaven, is an incentive for waiting. If our motive is only success, good messages and good services, then we will not have the stamina and incentive for that final waiting, which is the necessary death that must precede the falling of the fire. The falling of the fire may express itself in a holy hush before God, a moment of such a kind that you virtually stop breathing. God is there! And we need much more of that, and God wants us to have much more of that, not because we are 'glory seekers' in the sense that our flesh wants to be titillated, but that the whole earth should be filled with His glory. His glory is the testimony of Himself, which we ourselves often prohibit and preclude by our own religious and ministerial actions, because we do not know and are not disposed to wait. Men can conduct successful religion, but only priestly ministry can bring down fire from heaven, the glory of God. The glory of God and the fire of God are equally attached to and exclusive to priestly ministration. Glory is lacking in God's house, and it is glory that ignites and empowers the word, and transforms doctrine and mere religious services into life-changing conviction and heavenly events.

True Blessing

After the last sacrifice, and after the last waiting, and after the last waving of the sacrifice then,

> … Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them …
> (Leviticus 9:22a)

Can you imagine what those hands looked like? They were steeped and impregnated with blood and gore, right into the fingernails and every pore. He would have looked more like a butcher than a priest. At the incident of the fashioning of a golden calf, God asked the people of Israel which of them would be on the Lord's side, and it was the Levites who separated themselves from the rest of the profaned Israelites, and came to Moses, thereby standing on the Lord's side. They were then required to put their swords on, and go in and out of the camp, and every man was to slay his friend, his father and his neighbor. By

this act the priests were consecrated to God, and in fact, the word ‘consecrated’ means ‘hands full of blood.’

So here is Aaron lifting up his hands to bless the people. Only priests can raise holy hands above men and command blessing from heaven. Only the priest has the authority, only he has been in the presence of the Most High. One of the reasons why *our* attempts at blessing do not convey a blessing is because they are not priestly, and they are not priestly because they are not bloody. It did not cost anything, there was no sacrifice. It was easy and facile, the mere intonation of words that *speak* of blessing but do not *constitute* blessing. It was not a hand that has been dipped in blood. A priest is not a priest if he cannot pronounce blessing, and what is his blessing if it is only a mere verbalization without bringing the palpable blessing in fact?

In fact, there has been no word more cheapened than the word *blessing*—Bless you brother, bless you sister … bless the Lord, etc. It has been spoken and used as a ‘fill-in,’ and something good sounding to punctuate the silence. We need, therefore, to contend for, and bring back from the dead, this word ‘bless.’ It has become a pitiful cliché by people who do not even expect that something is going to be conferred by the speaking of the word. True blessing is a priestly benediction that *performs* something. Something of a palpable and substantive kind is *transmitted*. It is something manifest from heaven brought into the deeps of men, and blessedness is experienced, the absence of which is known by the word, *curse*.

The Glory of God

> … and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (Leviticus 9:22b–24)

Everything had been done according as it was commanded, and then God *Himself* ignited the sacrifice supernaturally. It is interesting that the seventh day of waiting results in the eighth day of release. The number eight represents the resurrection life and power. Seven days of complete death and the eighth day of the power, which is the life of God Himself.

If we have not seen *that* glory, it is because we have not fulfilled *all* that the Lord commanded us to do. If there is any single distinctive that is at the heart of apostolic, it is the singular jealousy for the glory of God. That is what makes us fools for Christ’s sake, namely, a faith that believes for that glory, and a jealousy for the demonstration of that glory. To have any lesser criterion for success is to rob God’s people, and to frustrate the Lord Himself, and to fixate us at a lesser level. When the glory of God appears, then the

Lord appears, for the Lord *is* His glory. It is this appearance that the church so desperately needs. His glory is not some ethereal thing, but a substantive phenomenon that can be seen and experienced. We have lived so long *without* it that we are satisfied merely with the phrase *about* it without any real expectation *for* it. *"To Him be the glory in the church …"* is Paul's summation of the church in Ephesians 3:21a. There has got to be glory in the church, or it simply is not the church, and it has failed in its purpose. If glory does not come through the church, then it does not come at all, and if it is not in the church, then how shall it be communicated anywhere in the world?

> … and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces. (v 24b)

This is the *effect* of the appearing of the glory of God on men, despite their resistance, self-will and shallowness. Your face is what you are. Everything came down before God when they saw *that*. And that alone is true blessedness. There was none of that 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah' stuff that punctuates our charismatic services, but a prostration that is so profound and so utter that when you rise from that, you never rise in the same way in which you went down. All of your seeing, your whole perspective, all of your reckoning, valuing and plans are affected by that going down. You cannot again go on as before. That is what happens when you fall before the demonstration of the glory of God. The God of Moses and Aaron is God still, and if He will have a priestly people on the earth as consecrated as were Aaron and his sons, then that glory will again fall.

The priests were to teach the people the difference between the profane and the sacred. How then as the Body of Christ can we manifest this distinction to the world? How can we perform priestly ministry with such discernment when a priestly reality is absent from our own lives? Perhaps we have neglected to ascend the holy mount, or have lost all desire for transfiguration glory. We have not recognized that there is a holy place where one stands alone in the presence of God, ministering first to Him. We have grown content to remain outside the tent of meeting where our religious activity has become a kind of entertainment, technically correct, but devoid of glory, devoid of the fragrance of heaven and devoid of priestly ministry.

Jesus Himself came out of the holy place with God, and so must every minister who aspires to be priestly. The brashness, the metallic ring, and the human, earthly atmosphere of so much ministry is sure evidence that men have not waited in the holy place, or even recognize that there is such a place to which God is calling them, and which awaits them. Our voices, like our faces, are a trademark and a statement of a consistent relationship with the God of all grace. They indicate in an unmistakable way the truth and depth of a believer's relationship with his God. When that radiance comes, the irony is that we will *not* even know it! We will have come to a total unselfconsciousness about ourselves, that we will not even be aware that we are shining. This radiance is obtained in one place only, namely, the priestly place, a place of waiting in the presence of God by those who believe that there is such a place, and have the faith to enter it, and live and move and have their being from that place. Then the world will know the difference between the sacred and the profane.

There has been a failure of the priestly ministry to be expressed in our midst that we have lost even the desire to experience the glory of God. We have grown content with so little, content with merely ‘good’ meetings and expecting no more. An expectation must first be rekindled in us, an expectation that the glory of God can actually fall from heaven like fire—men brought down on their faces, awe, gasps, hands clasped over mouths and deep breakings. If we desire this result for the wrong reasons, then we can forget of ever seeing it. Those of us who desire to see people coming down in great prostration can even secretly desire it for their own self-glorification: "Look what *my* preaching has obtained!" How many of us, who stand behind the pulpit, have in the back of our minds that we are the ones who are going to score a home run? How much of that is unconscious, yet nevertheless there? We want to see the glory of God, but we want to see it for *our* glorification, and therefore we do not see it. It is an abomination, and we are cheating people from God’s glory because such subtleties of self still inhere in our carnal ministerial hearts. When we seek to frame a message in order to impress our audience, then that is the end of the message – it is no longer a priestly word.

As the Priest, so also the People

This is one of the reasons why we need each other. There is no man, however pure his priestly desire, who will not one day slip into some admixture and some desire for personal glorification if he is not in some kind of daily relationship with others, who will detect the first signs of it, and call it to his attention. We cannot maintain this priestly-ministry jealousy alone. It was Aaron *and* his sons. The whole congregation of Israel was assembled to witness the consecration of Aaron and his sons, because all were intimately involved and profoundly connected. The priest was not just a religious functionary who received payment for services rendered. There was a vital link. As the priest, so also the people. We see in Israel’s history the decline of the priesthood, the loss of their purpose, their becoming a professional class and the final horror is what Caiaphas became as the tormentor and persecutor of Jesus. We see how even that high calling can go so low. It was a statement of Israel itself. When the priests have come to that place, then the nation is also in that place. If you want to study the history of Israel, then study the history of its priesthood.

When Israel’s priestly class was full of zeal and had a heavenly respect for its calling, then Israel was at its zenith. When they began to be seduced away, and were attracted to the Hellenistic culture that was then sweeping the world, and which was the exaltation of man, then Israel declined and ultimately collapsed. The same could be said of the church at large today. We, too, are somewhat embarrassed and offended by the cutting and bloodshed that is inseparable from priestly ministry. We too are swept up in the culture of our day, finding the entertainment, the methods, the psychology, and the wisdom of our age more enlightened and engrossing than the crude insistence on radical purging and cleansing. We have turned away from the priestly thing of sacrifice and blood. It is another way of saying that we have turned away from ‘the offense of the Cross.’

We have become smooth professionals and especially this generation. There are so many young men in places, not only of ministry and influence, but supreme places. They are barely into their thirties, and yet they have congregations of thousands of souls. They are whiz-kid successes, with all the 'know how,' and on those rare occasions when I glimpse them on someone's television set, my stomach is sickened. It is so glib, unctuous and professional, because the seeking of God, the blood, and the waiting are unknown to ministers of that kind. Too many of our ministers are coming to resemble modern Rabbis more than biblical priests, and therefore too many of our congregations are coming to resemble merely amiable, religious assemblies, rather than the peculiar people of God. We do not stand out, because we intuitively know that it would invite repercussion upon ourselves. We are too much like the world, because so also are our ministers. They themselves are the pictures of worldly accomplishment, in the way they dress, their rings, bracelets, and glitter, showing that the world has swept in.

God has, however, established His order. The outer layers, passable in the world, must be stripped off. The Word must wash our nakedness. Then the priestly garments are put on, one by one, in prescribed order, and there was to be only the linen of righteousness—no wool, for God's priests shall not sweat. They went up on a ramp, not on steps. They did not dare lift their legs to the next step lest any flesh be glimpsed. No flesh was to stand in His presence, and no sweat, both the statements of religious, human exertion, rather than the priestly ministry that comes out of the rest of God. With all the hacking, all the slaying, all the blood letting, one would think they would be drenched with sweat. But when we will do the prescribed thing given by God, in an exacting obedience by the Life of God, it will not be done with sweat. The fact that our Sundays are so sweaty is a testimony to the fact that they are no longer priestly. One of the great ironies of our time is that more sweat is exuded on Sundays than any other day of the week. There is more feverishness, more anxiety, more apprehension and nervous exhaustion, more fleshly exertion to produce successful religion than we care to acknowledge. If we were more jealous for His glory than our own honor and reputation, then we would not sweat so much. The sweating shows that there is something in it for us, that is to say, we do not want to take the risk of failing before God's people.

To be priestly is to be untainted by human fretting, human contrivance and human exertion. There is something in all of the laborious requirements, the sacrifices and sprinklings, so immersed in blood and gore from finger tips to elbows, that precludes there being anything of *themselves* left to perform something priestly. This is the heart of the mystery of priesthood. It must be performed in the power of His everlasting life, not in some makeshift pumping up of ourselves into some image of what we think priestly ministry ought to be. God's priests were so enervated, devastated, and exhausted of all bravado and self-assurance, and so filled with the understanding of the holiness of the things that were set before them, that they could not even begin to presume to initiate, or to do anything out of their own humanity.

The Call to Priesthood

We have fallen so far from the sense of priestliness that we consider service to men to be the highest expression we can, or need to attain to. We regard the sweat of our exertions in that service as evidence of our approval, but God sees it otherwise. The heavenly priest comes out from the holiest place, out from waiting upon God, out from being emptied from all his own good ideas, good intentions and methods. He lets go of his own order of service, his own message, his own selection of songs, and comes forth with that which is given by God. We need to see more of such people, willing to forsake their own intentions.

There seems to be a conspiracy, a calculated campaign, to drive the consciousness of priesthood from the church. We are inundated with sound and noise, multimedia displays, concerts—the sensual ear and eye thing—that not only has to be heard, it has also to be *felt*. In that milieu, God is yet calling us to be the priests of the holy place. If our speaking has anything to do with the releasing of the word of God from heaven, then it can only come from having heard what He has commanded us to bring in the holiest place of all, which is a place of silence.

Ironically, when one such minister comes, who has waited in the place of silence, we are not always happy over him. We are intimidated because we thought we had it all together. We saw ourselves as well-meaning and industrious elders, who were able to quote the Scriptures, and had a firm grasp on the doctrines of the faith, and knew how to counsel men. Then comes a visitor from heaven, a priest of God, and we are devastated. He brings an aura, a fragrance, and a spirit that challenges us and reveals us to ourselves. All of a sudden, we feel earthbound, heavy and all too human. We recognize that so much of what we had been doing and saying had become old, earthbound and stale.

We need more invasions from heaven, and priests who will come and minister before men only after they had first ministered to God in the holy place. We need priestly ministry, ministry from men who have first made sacrifice for themselves, who have first offered up their flesh, their own ambitions, their own vanity, and self-deceit, their own fear and greed and man-pleasing. We need men who have a heart to endure the ‘wearisome’ requirements of God, and who will submit to the painful dealings. We need men who are prepared to see blood spurt, and wounded flesh writhe and kick and gasp for breath. We need men who will stand steadfast and immovable, who will let death be worked in them to the end, who are willing to suffer the reproach and embarrassment of inner parts being exposed. Such men are rare. They are God’s priests, who alone are qualified to wield God’s sword, sanctified by blood. They alone have the disposition and utter fearlessness required to cut into the flesh of God’s people, and to expose the inward hidden parts of our being, to wound flesh and let its lifeblood flow out.

The Melchizedek Priesthood

Though these Levitical practices are no longer required, the truth of them yet is. We need to have our understanding altered, because God says of His Son:

> Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:6b)

It is a new order, not the Aaronic order, which has passed away. The old priestly order is dispersed and lost. The new order is, in fact, older than the Aaronic order. When Abraham came back from defeating the kings of Sodom, he met a mystical figure, and gave him a tenth of all that he had. He deferred to him, for the lesser is blessed of the greater. This high priest served him bread and wine, and his name was Melchizedek. It was an Old Testament glimpse, a pre-incarnate flash of what is to be the abiding and eternal glory of the Son of Man, who abides a priest forever. Abraham, great man of faith that he was, recognized the authority and superiority of that priesthood. It precedes even the establishment of the Aaronic order, which was only itself a shadow of the greater thing to come.

Not only is there a connection between *apostolic* and *priesthood*, but there is also a connection between *sons* and *priests*. This mysterious high priest, this Melchizedek, is not descended from the genealogy of Aaron, but a king of righteousness and peace, of whom it says in the Scriptures:

> Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually. (Hebrews 7:3)

It is a remarkable antithesis to the earlier priesthood, which was exactly opposite to this. The Melchizedek order is above culture, time and nationality. It is without beginning of days or ending of life. In fact, anything earthly contradicts it. The Aaronic priesthood required genealogy, ancestry and earthly identification. The new resembles the Son of God, a priest without interruption and who abides eternally. What is the source of His animation, His energy and His life? God has called us to be such a people in order to fulfill His eternal purpose, and be the agency for a Kingdom that is to come. What kind of priesthood is this? It is something other than a professional, ministerial posture that is so rampant everywhere. This is true priesthood, a priesthood without interruption. Are we jealous to be this kind of a priest? This priesthood is equally incumbent and required of us, not on the basis of natural qualification, but in exact proportion as we are above time, culture and nationality, without mother or father or ancestry, without beginning of days or ending of life. It is to be performed in a continual flow, out from the Throne of God Himself, on the basis of the power of an endless and indestructible life.

The higher and truer identity is the one *in* God that abides as a priest forever. It will take a wrenching, because how will your father and mother like it? To renounce your physical identification will be a slap in their face. You have to be cut off from those things that want to obsess you and establish your identification in earthly terms. It is part of the price, and one cannot explain it to men. "Who is My mother?" said Jesus, in reply to being told that His mother and brothers were waiting outside. By an earthly evaluation that sounds cruel, but that is because we have not entered into His priestliness, and have not understood the profound detachment that a priest must have from every fleshly

connection here on earth. Ironically, we will never be a better son or daughter than when we will come to this priestly detachment. There is a whole sickly, soulish involvement of life between parents and children, where they live off each other in a 'vampiry' type of bloodsucking relationship.

We need to come to an identity beyond what we are in the earthly and natural way, and yet not to diffuse or eliminate male nor female, Jew nor Gentile. Satan's ploy is to obscure and eliminate the distinctions that God counts very important. It is not that they should be abolished, but that something transcendent comes out of the union of these distinct entities that creates a 'new man.' It is a strange paradox of being a Jew or a Gentile, a male or female, and not annulling that obvious thing, but esteeming it as from the God who gave it for His own purposes. And yet, we are not to celebrate it in a way that forms a kind of membrane between ourselves and those who are not like us. Wherever time, culture, ethnic, earthly and temporal factors are invoked, consciously or unconsciously, we move out of that priestliness, and we forfeit the New Testament priestly ground, and its power. A priest is detached from racial, ethnic and cultural lines as well as from time and place. He is one who occupies the heavens *with* God. He is not at all affected or limited by present, contemporary culture. Standing above it, he is transcendent, and therefore he is relevant everywhere, and at any time.

Abraham obeyed the call of God to come out of Ur of the Chaldees only *after* his father died. There was a delay in the city of Haran, where he did not hearken to the call of God, which was to get out of nation, kindred and father's house, and to follow the Lord into the land that was to be shown him. He collected much substance and many souls in Haran, but it was not the place of blessedness. How many Charismatic, Pentecostal and Evangelical saints are in that place today? How many have misconstrued substance and souls as if *it* constitutes blessedness? *It does not.* You are in a place of delay, still attached to flesh, still attached to kindred and father's house, and you have not come out to begin the priestly walk where true blessedness begins.

If you want to operate from that lesser place, one can, but it will not be priestly. You come into this calling because you have come into the Son, who is the King of Righteousness as well as the King of Peace, the High Priest of God. If you are *in* the Son of Man by virtue of joining Him in His death by the power of the Cross, through baptism, you are also with Him abiding as a priest continually. You are in the Melchizedek priesthood in exact proportion as you are abiding in the Son, no more and no less. It has nothing to do with natural factors, but only with resurrection life, a life offered in sacrifice and raised up in glory. We are brought to a transcendent place of identification with Him by which every natural, racial, religious, ethnic and other distinction is transcended.

> And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become such not on the basis of a law of a physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. (Hebrews 7:15–16)

It is the same life, bursting forth out of death in resplendent glory, and now available to everyone who will give it opportunity to be expressed—out of their own death. It is the foundation of the royal priesthood and the community of God. This kind of priesthood, that is uninterrupted and that resembles the Son of God, needs also to have as its foundation and source the endless and indestructible life of the Son. We are not going to play at being priests by building on the strength of our own expertise, ability, knowledge, religious cleverness, and even our own well-meaning intention. The Melchizedek priesthood is not based on the inheritance that is come by blood and ancestry. It is based on the inheritance that has come by the blood of the Lamb, to those who have entered into the Life of that Blood and have put aside their own, that they might express, through that Blood and through that Life, these priestly things.

It is my conviction that the issue of the resurrection is going to be the fiercest end-time issue for the people of God. It is going to be the plumb line of God that separates the false church from the true. The false church will, no doubt, applaud the *doctrine* of the resurrection; but they will refuse to live in it, and by it. That shall be the great divide, between those who have mere verbal profession, and those who are in the Life.

Seated in Heaven

> Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all … .(Hebrews 8:4a)

In other words, He is in another dimension, namely, the heavenly place. Anything less than that would invalidate His priestliness. He has His true existence and reality in the heavenly sanctuary. If He dwelt on the earth, which is to say, if His values and mind-set were earthly, then He would not be a Priest at all. God intended that those made in His image would live in the reality of heaven, even while on the earth. They are *on* it but they do not dwell *in* it. When the smoke clears at the very end of the age, in the eschatological climax, there will only be two species of mankind to be found on earth, and it has nothing to do with race, but with earth or heaven. Those who dwell *in* the earth, whose hearts fail them for fear of the things that shall be coming upon the earth—for that is all they know and all they look for and expect. All of their values are established in it. They are earthlings—and the other group are those who dwell in heaven. They may be on the earth, but it is not their place of habitation. Earth is not where they reside, but the place where they serve. Most of us as Christians are earthlings, moored in the earth, so bound by its gravitational tug, so connected by soulish ties of affection and investment in the earth. It will take a wrench of soul to ascend up into the heavenly place.

The Holy of Holies

Only the High Priest could come before God in the holiest place of all. God has eternally fixed it that way. Therefore, in Exodus 25, it is interesting to read the description of the holiest place. God gives it to us in extraordinary detail. We know that the Tabernacle of God, like the Temple that came later, has the same essential architectural pattern and outer court. It was open to the daylight without any covering. The place of entry is the bronze altar for sacrifice and the basin for washing, symbolic of our entry into the house of God through the atonement of the Blood of the Lamb. As we then proceed further, there is a second court, covered by skins, and there is a veil through which the priests daily entered. There were not as many as trafficked in the first court, in the heavy labor of sacrifice and fire and slaughter. Only those priests whose function it was to light, both morning and night, the holy altar of incense, and to place the shewbread on the table of the Lord, went into this second court. It was a room that was shut off from the natural daylight. It received its illumination from a seven-branched candlestick, a much brighter light, not subject to the variables of the natural elements of weather and sunlight. It was light of a kind, but there is yet a final and an ultimate place, and few there be that have entered there. It is the holiest place of all! The Holy of Holies, and there is no daily traffic there. There was only one who could enter there in the course of an entire year, and only then on the basis of the blood of a pure sacrifice. There was no seven-branched candlestick, and yet it was the brightest and most glorious light of all. It is the Shekinah glory of God Himself. It is His Presence, above the mercy seat and over the ark of the Law.

> And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide. And you shall make two cherubim of gold, make them of hammered work at the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim of one piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. And the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing one another; the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the mercy seat. And you shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. (Exodus 25:17–22)

Perhaps some of us are already emitting a groan as we become increasingly conscious of the magnitude of what this *apostolic* and *priestly* calling is. How do we move from an institutional age toward the restoration of apostolic glory in the church? How do we communicate the dimension of things that have been lost in our modern church experience? How are we to restore the sense of urgency and imminence of the things that shall shortly come to pass? How shall we warn our generation that God has appointed a Day in which He will judge all nations by Him whom He has raised from the dead? How are we to be fitted for such apostolic confrontation? Where is our courage, our boldness, our understanding, and our sensitivity? We need to thread our way through all these painful adjustments, and turn from the power of tradition, the established and institutional

ways of men, in order to come to the formation of this living church in its prophetic witness. Where are we to find our answers?

> And there I will meet with you … and speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. (v 22)

This is the alternative to becoming mere technicians and adopting yet another brittle phraseology. God bids us come into the holiest place of all, the high-priestly place, that is open to those who come in the form of the Son of God, without father or mother, or beginning or ending of days. It is the source of the indestructible life, a source of inspiration and anointing, of words that He will give us, if indeed we desire to fulfill the mandate of God. There is a holy place beyond, and there is an entry within that veil by the Holy Spirit, symbolized by the burning incense on the altar that continually ascends up to God. There is a seeing in a much brighter light new things beyond the initial issue of salvation to the more serious and purposeful things of God. It is a deeper place that admits only 'high priests.' We will never glimpse the things apostolic and true except in *this* light. We will never fulfill the apostolic mandate except it be by the words that are given with inspiration, and that are communicated with the intensity of the Life transmitted in the holiest place of all. God bids us enter into this place, and to dwell in that Presence, for there He will meet with us, and give us all in commandment for the sons of Israel.

Within the Veil

I had waited a long time for such an entry. I thought I had to qualify spiritually. As much as I am at war with the secular world, something of its concept of evolution yet lingered with me, so that I thought that I had to 'evolve' into a higher spiritual state, by virtue of which I would then be able to enter into this holiest place. I stumbled, however, upon a series of teachings that were entitled: *"Within the Veil"* and something in my inner man went *click*, and I could not rush fast enough to hear them. I put the first tape on with great expectations. Something in my spirit was rising to the mystery in this, and as soon as I heard the first few statements, I was tempted to shut the machine off. Some 'hillbilly' American was speaking. He was coarse and ungrammatical, not my style at all, but as my finger went to the stop button, I hesitated, because something now began to reach me through his accent. It was beyond nationality, beyond culture, beyond time, beyond father or mother or beginning or ending of days. I continued to listen, tape by tape, of a man whose frustration was much like my own. He had the same risings and fallings of the spiritual life, the good days and the bad days, that render us incapable of saying with Paul, *"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time"* (Acts 20:18b). As I followed him in the Scriptures through the book of Hebrews, he showed that the Law was only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very form of those things, and that it could not make perfect those who draw near. He went on to explain that there was One who came in point of time who could. His blood

was better than the blood of bulls and of goats and of sacrifices. He had entered by His own blood into the heavenly place, and entered once and for all.

In all of our impressive, spiritual ‘sophistication’ we have not allowed these words to impact upon our souls. He entered once and for all, and He bids us enter also, and to enter boldly. It is *not* on the basis of our natural qualification. We must enter the holiest place by the blood of Jesus. We have come to think of His blood only in terms of our atonement, and indeed it is sufficient to wash away sin and guilt, but His blood has done something more. It has opened a new and living way, inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. Since, therefore, we have such a Great High Priest, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

I remember the night I heard the last tape. I was in bed, my Bible open to these Scriptures in the book of Hebrews, and he described in the last tape how he came to a Sunday morning service as a minister, weary and defeated, in that kind of terrible monotony and predictability which our churches can so easily come to. But there was a woman that morning in the service who was a very bright light. She could hardly contain herself, and she was waving her arm in the air, wanting to give a testimony.

"Yes sister," he said. And she replied,

"I just want to say that I have entered within the holiest place of all." He was quick to correct her,

"You mean to say that you hope to enter." (After all she was only a housewife, he thought.)

"No," she said, "I have entered."

"By what means?" he said.

"By faith in the blood of Jesus, and the veil that was rent by His flesh! I simply drew near with a true heart of faith, and I confessed that right now, in Jesus’ name, without any acknowledgment of qualification in myself that I do enter into the holiest place of all by the blood of Jesus," she replied.

She said that something had happened to her, and that she had entered into a ‘new place’—and it was visibly true of her. Before that service had ended, one by one, people were getting up in the congregation and making a simple confession of their ‘entering right now’ on the basis of the blood of Jesus into a new and living way. The pastor himself entered, for which reason I was now hearing his tapes. A new kind of enablement had come to him of an enhanced and deepened quality of apostolic faith. There was a fresh source of creativity and originality that one receives in a place of communion with God in the holiest place of all. At about this point I shut my tape machine down. I took my glasses off and thought for a moment, reflecting upon my years in Christ—the frustration, the rising and the falling, and I just simply breathed a prayer, flat on my back.

I said, "Lord, right now, not on the basis of any qualification, I do enter into the holiest place of all by the blood of Jesus and the veil rent by His flesh. Amen." Something in my deepest inner man went *click,* and I believe I have been in that place ever since, holding fast the confession of the faith. A new kind of freedom from the torment of wrestling with flesh commenced. Something happened when I entered in through the veil of His torn flesh that dealt with my flesh in a way I can hardly understand or communicate. It is certain that every power of Hell will seek to steal this from us: "Oh, this is only a play on words, just a kind of Biblical rhetoric. There is no real, actual place of entry. This heavenly thing is only a vapor. It is an intangible thing. You have all that you need by virtue of your new birth. This is only a conceit on your part. Look, you are still the same!" Hold fast the confession of your faith. This is far beyond mere Christian respectability, far beyond any kind of 'nice-guyism.' This is having a conscience void of offense with God and with man.

> Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

If we shall not receive it and if we shall not find it, then how shall we give it? We are therefore bidden to enter. It is the Sabbath rest that God has prepared for His people. Religious acts and works that stem from a bad conscience, that is to say, something that you feel obliged to do, are called *dead works* by God. The *work* of God comes always and eminently out of the *rest* of God, and is always performed on the Sabbath day, and no other. It alone is that act which brings sight to the blind. When the Jews of Jesus' time were antagonized and stupefied at this bewildering Man, who performed these glorious things on the wrong day, He could say to them in utter simplicity that it was the Father who was doing the works. You will know when you are in the rest of God when you are at peace. This does not mean there will be an absence of trial or tension. Even in the midst of the turmoil of it, you are in the Shekinah place, the holiest place of all, independent of the circumstances that are flurrying everywhere about you.

God is not cruel to set before us such a calling, and to think that we shall be able to fulfill it on the paucity of our own human enablement. There is yet a deeper place, an ultimate place, and an absolute place. It is the holiest place of all, and it is for all those who are called to that which is apostolic and high-priestly. Consider Jesus as you have never before considered Him—the Son in whose image we also are called. The one who is joined to Him is one spirit with Him. We can understand Paul better when he says that he lives and moves and has his being in Him. Where are we and where do we desire to be, and where have we the faith to be? Do we desire an apostolic participation in the eternal purposes of God? Will we be able to stand against apostolic persecution and suffering? We have got to come into a certain priestly place without which there cannot be an apostolic fulfillment. Jesus has rent the veil and bids us come, not on the basis of *our* qualification, but on the basis of His blood.

God is calling us to an unusual involvement and participation. There is a high-priestly place available for us as a life that flows, and which is indestructible. Faith comes by

hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. This is not some fanciful play on words, but something to be earnestly considered. Faith is now, and the hour has struck and the time is short, and God is requiring a fulfillment that can only come from this place within the veil. Have the faith to enter with a true and sincere heart in full assurance of faith.

Saved to the Uttermost!

The priestliness we are called to is eternal. It is written into our life. We are part and parcel of it, being caught up into the High Priest. We are one with Him, which means that everything has got to be sanctified. This priestliness is meant to enter and permeate every aspect of our life, even the most mundane. In fact, it is in the most mundane places that it is the most precious. The most ordinary things become holy. The whole of life becomes a sacrament. Eating is no longer a gastronomic activity. Sex is not just getting your relief. We dare not approach our bedrooms, our kitchens, our chance conversations without feeling that sanctifying affect of this High Priest, whom we have put on. There is no longer trivial, careless talk. Everything is significant, consecrated, having an eternal weight of glory. It is a transfiguration of life itself by bringing into it a heavenly dimension.

This is true priestliness, and one can measure the absence of it by the absence of a real knowledge of resurrection life. The two are intimately linked together. Ours is not a physical heritage like that of Aaron's, but a spiritual heritage by virtue of entering *into* resurrection life. We cannot alter or tailor the priestly garments to suit ourselves. There was one high-priestly garment for Aaron, and it is not cut down to accommodate the measure of men. Aaron's successors had to grow into it, and so is it also for us today. There is one holy garment, one holy Melchizedek Priest to put on, and we must grow up into Him. To do less, and to minister out of anything other than the resurrection life, is to fall short of priestly ministry. Anyone with discernment should recognize the difference. The burdens that inhere in this priesthood are far greater, and the demands are more drastic than the Levitical priesthood, but the power to meet and to fulfill them is likewise greater. To put this garment on is to put on resurrection life. We have heard good messages, good teachings and good ministry, but there is a difference between that which is good and that which is empowered by 'life out of death.' Without death there is no resurrection life. Without entering into that death in waiting, humiliation, obedience and consecration, there is no entering into the life and calling of the High Priest.

It is better that we remain insensitive and unmoved, and be willing to wait for those burdens that come as expressions out of the indestructible Life from heaven, rather than fashion burdens for ourselves out of guilt, or our own ideas of what is appropriate and spiritual. Such self-wrought and convenient burdens will burst like a bubble when the first challenge and the first pressure and need to sacrifice self-interest touches them. The burden must come from the indestructible, resurrection Life of the King of Righteousness in heaven. It must come from the Life of the True Priest, who neither has, or desires, any earthly inheritance, who is not bound to earth and upon whom nothing of this world has a

grip and a hold. When we put on this priestly garment, fastened on with cords that ascend to heaven, we are bound to heavenly realities, and not to the constraints of this earth.

Jesus is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. He is able, therefore, to save to the uttermost, completely, perfectly and eternally all those who draw near to God through Him. We need more of this kind of salvation and far less of the shabby kind that produces countless tens of thousands who are called 'saved' but who are not 'converted.' Those whose lives are one long struggle to make it for God, and who are trying to hang on until the end to find at least a little niche in heaven, have surely not been brought to salvation by a Melchizedek priest, because one brought to God through him is saved *to the uttermost*!

We need more of this 'uttermost' salvation and less pre-packaged evangelistic techniques. We need more priests bringing the conviction and mercy of God down from His throne in heaven, and less well-meaning men bringing their own devices and systems out from their own heads. We need more lifting up of God and less pandering to man's self-interest. We need to stop appealing to men on the basis of all the benefits that will accrue to them if they would only 'accept' Jesus. A true priest would gag and choke on such terminology and egocentric appeals, based on benefits to self for 'accepting' Jesus. He would be repulsed by it, because it is a contradiction in terms. It is *not* salvation in the Biblical sense of the word. True salvation is to be saved *out* of oneself, and to be saved out of oneself is to be saved to the uttermost. How can we bring men to true salvation when we ourselves have not been truly converted, when we ourselves are still bound in self-interest, when we have not experienced the exchange of our old fleshly life for the resurrection life? God's Holy Seed is meant to reproduce itself after its own kind, but all around us we see reproduced the image of ourselves, our incompleteness and carnality. We need more priests to be the instruments of the salvation of men on the basis of the power of the indestructible life, and not on the basis of their own ideas, sentiments or soulish appeals. These things are so desperately needed upon earth, because men are perishing, even while they are living. Our mental breakdowns and emotional disorders, ulcers and cancers are more often than not derived from lives that are lived in unreality. The body was not designed by God to live in untruth. Heaven is reality and righteousness, and we are called to be the priests of that reality.

Summary

The final outworking of ‘the mystery of Israel and the church’ at the end of the age is that the natural sons of Abraham (the Jew) will meet again, as the Abraham of old, that ‘one’ who is greater, the one who can confer blessing, the one who radiates heaven. That meeting will be a revelation of a God whose priests they are. The church’s final ministry to Israel, namely, the moving of them to jealousy, will never be accomplished on the basis of our charismatic services, but on the basis of our priesthood. What a staggering thing for a Jew to find in a Gentile the very priestliness that exceeds even that which is Aaronic, that is right out of the throne of God, and that is from the heaven of heavens. If that will not move them to jealousy as it radiates out of our faces, then there is no other salvation for them. They need to encounter what Abraham encountered thousands of years ago, and when he saw it, he instantly recognized Melchizedek as the priest of the Most High God. He paid tithes to Melchizedek, though he was to become the father of nations, as Israel is to become. Abraham still had to find in that encounter a priest whose qualification and knowledge of heaven exceeded his own. This is how it will end for the remnant church, called to live and move in this reality.

Chapter 2 - Apostolic Perception: Eternity

> Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)

There is a danger that we will dismiss this as a kind of biblical rhetoric, a kind of fanciful manner of speaking peculiar to Paul, and nod with a kind of acquiescence that it has a sweet sound to it, but completely lose what is being said.

The foundation of the apostolic mindset, however, is a true apprehension of the things that are eternal, not in anticipation of a future enjoyment, but of a present appropriation, and *that* is what makes the church peculiar. We have no idea how important the subject of eternity is. To lose the meaning of this word is to lose everything, and it will condemn the church to being mundane and ordinary, institutional and mechanical, a weariness of the flesh, instead of a joy and a power. In other words, the absence of eternity in the consciousness of the church disfigures and nullifies it as being church. We are going to have to contend for this reality, because the world is not hospitable to it. Paul not only found this eternal dimension, he also dwelt in it, and yet that did not condemn him to irrelevancy. On the contrary, it made him all the more relevant, and so will it make us also.

In the above portion of Scripture, we find two references to the word *eternal*. Eternity was something that had become so powerfully real to Paul that it affected his present considerations, and had practical consequences for his living. *"This momentary, light affliction"* has got to be a statement of a man who has either tossed every kind of reasonable criterion and rationality to the wind (Paul was a man who had been shipwrecked, beaten with rods, left for dead, stoned, reviled, persecuted and defamed, etc.), or he has some kind of standard and measure of things of which we know nothing. Apostolic seeing perceives things that others do not see, and measures by a measure that others do not understand. It sees redemptive suffering in this lifetime as being merely *momentary* and *light*. The church must come to this seeing, for this seeing is apostolic reality and truth. What Paul *is*, is what the church must be.

Paul never did dwell on his sufferings in some kind of morbid way, but dismisses them as being momentary and light, and he can do so only on the basis of one thing, namely, the ability to glimpse the eternal weight of glory. This is not a luxury that we can consider ‘having’ or ‘not having.’ This is an utter, apostolic requirement for anyone who has serious intentions with God. The fact that we have not yet experienced suffering indicates where we have been until now, namely, exercising some lesser kind of faith—if it is a faith at all—that has not excited the world’s hatred against us.

I am talking about the most practical 'nuts and bolts' reality that will keep us as an apostolic people—for surely we are on a collision course with suffering. If we will not see the eternal and the eternal weight of glory, then what is a *light* affliction shall be for us *great*. What is momentary shall be long and continuous. Everything depends on our actual knowing of the eternal. We may know that eternity is there, and distant, and something that we will obtain after this life, but we have not brought the eternal dimension into the present now**,** and for that reason we have grievously erred, and to that degree we are not apostolic.

Seeing the Unseen

God's provision for bearing the things that must come in this life is looking upon the things that are eternal, unseen and invisible. The issue of seeing is crucial, and I know it is going to take a conscious and concerted effort to bring us to this kind of seeing. Everything presently conspires against it. The world wants to fill our eyes with all of its voluptuous images. Everything is clamoring for the attention of our senses. We are continually bidden to look *down* upon things. It takes an apostolic determination to break that, to close out the things that are visible, and to focus and dwell upon the things that are invisible and eternal. It will produce a remarkable thing in us, namely, a growing indifference to the things that are of the world. Paul did not look at the things that are seen. He wrested his eyeballs away from the visible, sensual things that would have been a gratification for his soulish, physical life. By his insistence not to see the things that were visible, God gave him to see the things that were invisible and eternal.

To be called to this kind of seeing is another name for suffering. The things that are *seen* give us assurance and confidence, but to turn our eyes onto the things that are invisible and eternal will produce a wrench in us. It is going to require an exertion and a moral energy to divert our eyes from the sensual things that are ever and always before us, and to learn to direct and fix them on the things which are invisible and eternal. To make *that* the basis for all our seeing is at the heart of apostolic! Do we see this world as under judgment? Do we see it as soon to pass away? Or are we overwhelmed and intimidated by the things that are visible?

> If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1–4)

We need to adjust our whole mind-set and attitude. We may 'believe' in eternity, but we have agreed with the world that it does not become relevant until *after* this life. In other words, it becomes applicable when this life has ended. To have this attitude guarantees we will not be found disagreeable or controversial to the world. The world wants to

relegate eternity to a future consideration that has no present application. Eternity is, however, not another kind of time frame; it is not merely endless time or a quantitative thing, but profoundly and foremost a *qualitative* thing. That qualitative thing is available *now*—it is eternity *now*. When we begin to see all our moments set in the context of eternity, we will bring to those moments an intensity, a care, a solemnity, and a seriousness that we would not otherwise have had. Heaven is reality, and it is coming down to earth. It is that new City whose Founder and Builder is God, and God has called us to the apostolic task of bringing eternity into time.

The Eternal Mindset

The book of Revelation begins by John speaking of the things that shall shortly come to pass. There is a certain immediacy and urgency in his apostolic writing, and yet it is almost two thousand years later, and it has not yet happened. He was not deceived, but rather writing and speaking from a mindset that God intends characteristically to be true of saints in *every* generation. We need to develop a sense for the things that are 'at hand,' the things that are imminent and about to come into time, for example, the appearing of the Lord, the establishing of His millennial Kingdom, and the apocalyptic conclusion of the ages.

We have not impressed the world or communicated to it the sense of the urgency of that which lies beyond death. In fact, we cannot begin to do it if we ourselves are not presently in that dimension. We can, therefore, only communicate eternity as a technical and theological truth. We know that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one and the father of lies. Lying is everywhere about us and in the very air that we breathe, and the greatest lie is the renunciation and rejection of eternity. Even the thought of it does not come into the consciousness of men. Men are living their lives in the world as if this life is the total purpose for being, and we have allowed them to get away with it. If we as believers subscribe to eternity by giving assent to the doctrine of eternity, the reality of which comes to us *after* death, then we have given ourselves over to the lie. Church is church when its very existence, presence and character are a refutation of the lie, because it shows that the issue of eternity and the things that are ultimate and that pertain to God are in fact the true questions of life. Church is church when it lives as if it believes that.

We need to come to the world as people who are presently *in* that dimension, where the things that are eternal are brought into our daily, mundane and ordinary considerations. When we do, then those things no longer become mundane and ordinary. Everything becomes charged with that which is eternal. When you stand before a people, it is not just a delivery of a message, but an issue of life or death. Things are hanging in the balance that will affect both time and eternity. The consequences, therefore, are momentous. Everything is charged with a meaning beyond that which one can define. Eternity has been brought into the *now*, and it is the whole dimension in which God Himself dwells. That is why Paul can speak about the eternal weight of glory, because that is where the realm of glory is to be glimpsed and sensed.

An Apostolic Distinctive

This is intrinsic to that which is apostolic, and this is one of the ways to tell the true from the false. The false apostles give the correct statements, but lack the sense of the eternal in what they are about and communicate. They are men of time, and you do not get the sense of that which lies beyond time. They have not been in that realm, and so they cannot communicate it. It is not part of their conscious being. I do not think that the full understanding of eternity can be obtained in a day, but is rather something that is fashioned over a process of time.

Paul is the quintessential apostle, and these are intrinsic and central elements of apostolicity—the apostolic mind-set. It is going to take a willful and calculated chosen policy of beginning to turn our sight and attention from the things that are before us to the things that cannot be seen. We need to make the realm of the invisible and eternal *our* realm, and the foundation of *all* our being. It must become the normative condition for all of our seeing. When we find ourselves in a culture or society, how affected and impressed are we by it? Do we see beyond and into the eternal? That seeing changes everything. Paul is *timeless*, and when he said he was a citizen of heaven, it was not a little fortuitous, glib phrase, but a statement of fact. That is where he had his effectual being, and where we must have ours also. To be apostolic is to be heavenly, nothing more and nothing less. We are not to be the parrots of glib phrases that other men have spoken. It is going to take a calculated shifting from our whole sensual and earthly orbit to break the power of it, and to bring us into another dimension where the weight of glory is. Once there, we need to live and move and have our being in it. We will be another kind of people. We will not be the *victims* of sin—we cannot be. Those are the symptoms of the fact that we are in the wrong place.

> For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven … (2 Corinthians 5:1–2)

Apostolic ‘knowing’ is something that is registered in our guts by which we long and groan. Do we so feel the weight of our mortality that our spirit yearns to be freed of this box and to come into what shall be the ultimate thing given by God, by which we shall be eternally clothed? Right now, so long as we must endure our mortal bodies, we endure them with groans, and not with hair blowers, pampering and perfuming, and not with fashions and fads. Our body is just a necessary contrivance and convenience that houses our spirit, but we groan so long as we are boxed in, waiting to be clothed with that which is eternal. This is ultimate sanity, and we need to come into it. I am not disparaging the body—Paul does not either, but there is something that is expressed here as a longing and groan that is at the heart of apostolic. It can only be expressed by one who has crossed that threshold and who is in the eternal realm—and knows it. We are far too much at home in the body. We are too much body conscious—how we appear, how we clothe it,

how we feed it, how it looks—and do not realize to what degree body consciousness robs us from true reality in God.

The whole world is calculated to conform us to its values. So long as we are in the realm that is temporal and earthly, we shall be its victims. If we only gaze at the things that are seen, and do not fix our eyes on the things that are invisible and eternal, we shall be swept into things that pertain to fashion and fads. If we dress ourselves in the fashionable, impressive and colorful, we have a body consciousness. No one will ever fault us, but it will rob us of a consciousness of God in the realm that is eternal. To be absent from the body, even in our attention and consciousness, to that degree, is to be present with the Lord. It is an apostolic principle against which the world is fighting like a mad dog to keep us from.

Strangers in the World

To live, move and have our effectual being in eternity will make us become strange and somewhat peculiar to all those who are outside of us. We are somehow continually looking upward, seeing things that do not occupy their attention. We will find ourselves becoming increasingly 'pilgrims' and 'sojourners' in the world, looking for a City not made with hands. This is not biblical poetry, but the normative intention of God for all true saints and foundational to the faith. We are those who are always looking for something that is not in view, but our very anticipation of it actually brings it to pass.

> Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! (2 Peter 3:11–12)

The 'Day of God' or the 'Day of the Lord's appearing' is not a fixed chronological event. It does not take place of itself independent of our condition, but rather it is *our very condition* that brings Him. We can hasten the Day of the Lord's appearing by being the kind of people we ought to be, that is to say, looking for and hastening the coming of the Day of God. This is not some esoteric subject, but utter reality. The issue of eternity is the issue of His coming, and the establishment of His Kingdom.

When Paul spoke to the Greek philosophers about a God who has appointed a Day in which He shall judge all nations by Him whom He has raised from the dead, it was as natural to him as breathing. He was not at all embarrassed to step from philosophy to theology in the same breath. For Paul it was not a matter of going from the secular to the sacred. It was *all* sacred, all eternal, all heavenly, and all real: a Day of Judgment and God as Judge. They were not just religious thoughts, but the very foundations of all reality. Paul dwelt in this eternal dimension, and brought it to bear on all of his earthly considerations. Eternity is the issue of Heaven or Hell, and we are going to be remarkably

ill equipped to speak of either unless the consciousness of eternity affects our every waking hour.

We need to squint our eyes just a little in order to sense the massive deception in which the whole world is lying. I see it especially in my own Jewish people. They are brilliantly intellectual, remarkable in their careers and professions, from physics to computers, sociologists, historians, businessmen, financiers; but they are completely mindless with regard to eternity. It is a category that has no weight for them. It is a vapor, an idle thing, but Paul let the philosophers of Greece know that the whole purpose of human existence is to seek after God. It sounds so embarrassing, so simplistic and intellectually dull, yet it is the very purpose for all of our being. We are to establish in this lifetime a relationship with God that will affect all eternity.

The Apostolic Task

Why do we not speak with that same simplicity, that same urgency and that same absoluteness? Perhaps we do not believe it as absolutely as Paul did, nor do we live as if we believe it. We are simply not that occupied with the things that are eternal, and therefore we are unable to persuade men. We need to press mankind to come to terms with eternity, even though they will accuse us of being dogmatic, narrow-minded and intolerant, and yet that will be enough to intimidate many of us to silence. There is nothing more embarrassing and intimidating to the modern Christian than to be considered narrow and dogmatic. It did not, however, intimidate Paul. Eternity is not a narrow concept, and the world needs to be disturbed by people who cannot contain themselves, who are beyond the issue of taste, politeness and good manners, who burn with the reality of eternity, and who take every opportunity to express the things that are Divine.

Our absoluteness is the very height of offense to a world that is relativistic and pluralistic. They do not want to be told that there is anything that is absolute, that there are only two eternal alternatives, but they need to be told, not by people who bring the correct doctrine, but by those who come with a burning conviction. Do we really believe God has fixed a Day in which He will judge the world in righteousness? Our apostolic task is to bring an unwanted and unwelcome message to an indifferent world, and it is a message we can only bring in the same proportion that we can demonstrate it. It is not enough to be ‘correct.’ We have to come to them, as it were, *from* the eternal place.

The Meaning of Eternity

Paul wrote to Timothy,

> Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called ... (1 Timothy 6:12a)

It is evident that Paul is not speaking of some future time, but *now*! It is something given by the life of God—a particular kind of wisdom, a mindset and a perception. Whosoever believes on Him, shall have eternal life, not just future, but now. It is a very peculiar state of being, a dimension that is concurrent with time, and indeed, it is a dimension that needs to be contended for, if we will enter into His life. *"Contend for the faith that was once given to the saints"* is more than just an injunction to embrace their doctrines, but an invitation to come into a certain dimension of being. It is not going to make you ethereal and irrelevant. You are not going to become dreamy or visionary, for if eternity is anything, it is the very essence of that which is real.

Eternity needs to be brought into time, and the church is the only agency on earth given by God through whom that can happen. But it is an apostolic church that lives, and moves, and has its being in the eternal dimension, and who abides in Him, who inhabits eternity. Our problem is that we secretly covet the world's admiration. We want to succeed on the world's terms, if not academically, then theologically. We find ways to be polite, and to address our Christian convictions in a manner by which the world can receive them. We have lost the apostolic view, which was intended to confront the world in its entire framework of thought, for the whole of non-Christian thought is a lie, for it has not reckoned on eternity. It has not brought the invisible things into its consideration, and therefore all of its other considerations are amiss.

The world needs to be confronted by the things that are eternal. Paul himself demonstrated this on Mars Hill. He struck at the very heart of the world and its lies. It is remarkable that he came down that hill alive, when he could just as easily have been the object of men stopping their ears and rushing upon him with teeth gnashing. Are we eager to preach Christ and Him crucified, Him risen, the soon coming King and Judge? We cannot divide these realities. Paul was determined not to know anything but Christ and Him crucified—and it takes a determination! Everything in the world, the flesh, and the Devil conspires against it. It wants to diminish this truth, and put it in mere religious and doctrinal categories, but we are enjoined to preach *this* gospel to every creature, namely,

> … He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

God has furnished proof to all men by setting a 'Paul' before them, who not only proclaims the doctrine of resurrection and judgment, but is himself a demonstration of the resurrection life, a taste of the power of the ages to come. The issue of resurrection is

already the issue of eternity, for it *is* the life to come. And when a man stands before unbelieving Greeks and speaks to them penetratingly out of that life, then God has furnished proof to those men.

Eternity as Resurrection Life

There is an entry into the eternal dimension through the reality of resurrection life. Merely *approving* the doctrine is not enough, we need to live and move and have our being in Jesus Christ, or our words about an imminent judgment are without value. There can be no preaching of the resurrection, or of eternal judgment unless the *entire* framework of our life is changed. Do we really want to see all men everywhere repent? They need to see the eternity that is already in us, and they shall be eternally condemned except that they receive Him in whose Name we come.

We are moving to a final and ultimate confrontation with the philosophical spirit of the world. Something timeless and eternal must be presented to men by an apostolic church, a people who have laid hold of that which is eternal, and are not just awaiting some future state. They are already appropriating it, and bringing it into their present consideration. The issue of the resurrection in us is the issue of eternity for them. God is desirous of an apostolic mind-set, for these are the foundations of the church—not the issues of the mechanics of church government, however important that might be in itself. A church without the eternal dimension, however correct it may be in every other form, is *not* an apostolic or authentic church.

This is a position far beyond correct doctrine. Something must come again into the atmosphere of God's corporate people, a sense of urgency that we ourselves cannot calculate or establish. We must be purveyors of a sense of imminence, and of the things that shall shortly come to pass. We must bring the eternal sense of things, and the eternal stakes of heaven or hell, because we have already sensed the eternal weight of glory as being so presently real to us *now***.** The rejection, the abuse, the reproach, and the persecution that will come to us for bearing an unwelcome word to a world that does not want to hear, is for us, only a momentary and light affliction. But it will be true only to the degree we see that which is invisible.

True Biblical Faith

The giants of the faith of Hebrews 11 were all eternally minded. What was the foundation and root of their overcoming faith? Why is Abraham called 'the father of faith'? We have to fight for the meaning of these great, biblical words. Even the word 'faith' itself has suffered terrible assault in this recent Charismatic generation, and so I am glad that God gives us definitive statements:

> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:1–6)

I am going to show that the reward God offers here is essentially not in *this* life, but in the life to come. True faith is a faith that does not *expect* its reward in *this* life, but *afterwards*. The men of old gained approval by their faith, but they did not obtain the promise. For example,

> By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should ***after*** (emphasis mine) receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. (v 8 kjv)

The word *after* is a critical, key word in the definition of biblical faith. In other words, there is something very peculiar about biblical faith, which does not expect or look for its reward, answer, consummation, fulfillment or gratification *now*, but *after*. This is totally contrary to the tenor of the world that looks for its gratification *now*. It is a conflict of two wisdoms, one is based on instant, immediate gratification *now*, and the other is predicated upon that which comes *after*. Everything that is natural, human, soulish, fleshly and carnal, expects, deserves and wants its gratification *now*. In a word, true faith calls us to a posture that is contrary to that which is 'natural.'

That is why we need to be weaned from natural gratification, and to find our orientation and being in that which is 'other-worldly' and beyond this life. We need to become citizens of heaven. All of these categories are contrary to the way that man is constituted naturally. That is why man would rather predicate his life on reason rather than on faith. Faith is unseen, but man wants to see, to be gratified; man wants *now*.

Abraham, the great father of faith, was not only called to go *out* but also called to go *into*. There is a conjunction between those two words. Israel was brought *out* of Egypt in order to be brought *into* the Land of Promise. Abraham was to go into a place he was to receive *after* for an inheritance. The words 'inheritance' and 'heir' are a theme that is repeated throughout the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Inheritance implies something that comes *after*, usually after a death.

> By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise. (v 9)

This is the foundation of Abrahamic faith, not only for Abraham, but also for those who dwelt with him. Isaac and Jacob, and all of the saints of old, had this as their foundation. They had the immovable confidence that they would be the heirs of promise. Everything is predicated on what was spoken by God. Verse 13 says that, *"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises."* This is not some typographical error, but the deepest meaning of the word 'faith.' The promises were *not* to be realized in their own lifetime. They all died, without exception, *not* having received the promises. Not one of them received the reward of their life of faith and sacrifice in this life, but received it as an inheritance *after*. I do not think any of them were bitterly disappointed. They knew better than to expect it in this present life, but they were assured of the reward, the promise and the inheritance. This life, therefore, was distinguished by a walk of faith as pilgrims and strangers, who embraced the hope and inheritance, though it was afar off.

Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to the Land of Promise, but when he was in it, which is to say, when he was in the right place, it was strange and foreign to him. He was uncomfortable, because it was not yet the time to inherit it. The time comes only *after*—after this life, in the resurrection that enters us into the eternal fulfillment of the promise. That means the whole premium of biblical faith rests on the assurance of resurrection. Abraham was expecting an eternal inheritance, which is why Paul could say that if there was no resurrection for us, then we of all men are most to be pitied. The 'faith' as it has been promulgated to us today is almost invariably situated in the now. It says, "You will receive health, you will receive a boyfriend, a girlfriend, an apartment, a job, a Cadillac—*now*." The emphasis is on *now*. It has a payoff *now*, or else you are out of the faith! For the great fathers of the faith, it was an inheritance to which they are heirs *after*. Even though they were physically in the Land of Promise, it was not yet the fulfillment for them.

If we are comfortable in this present world, we are not yet in the only true faith. To recite certain verses, and expect their material fulfillment, does not mean that we are in the faith. We are in the faith of Abraham when, like him, we are strangers and aliens, not only in the world, but also in the Land of Promise. We need to look for the coming of the Lord, to long for His appearing, the coming of that whole millennial and future fulfillment that is eternal. That is why eternity needs to come into our consciousness *now*. The remarkable paradox is that to be preoccupied with the things that are future and eternal would make you believe there would be little effect and consequence now. In fact, what does the world say, "If you are heavenly minded (eternally minded) you are of no earthly good." That is a lie, because the opposite is true, "Except you are heavenly minded, except you are eternally minded, you are of no earthly good." Every value that the world celebrates as right and true is unmistakably a lie. What the earth needs is not more earth, but more heaven. Eternity must come into time, the holy into the profane, the sacred into the everyday, by people who are already walking in heaven as if it is the very foundation of their life and being. *That* is the only true faith.

A promise is something spoken by God, despite every appearance to the contrary for its fulfillment, predicated entirely upon His honor, the truth of His Word, and His ability to fulfill it. Can you die with confidence believing that you will receive the promise, though you have not seen it in your lifetime? Can you believe it with such a quality of conviction that it affects, not only how you live, but also how you die? That is to say, we do not go around disappointed, dejected, or sullen. This gives us a much more realistic understanding of what the purpose for this present life is as well as the nature of the payoff in the life to come. The thing that God gives in power to loose us from the seduction of this present world is the assurance of the thing that comes *after*, namely, a City whose Maker and Builder is God.

I have heard people say, "If Paul only had faith, he would not have suffered all he did, and that he suffered because he had an 'inadequate' faith, and did not know that Jesus had already 'done it all,' and that all the sufferings were brought on him by himself; and that he did not have the faith to know his Kingdom privileges, and therefore he suffered." That statement reveals just how warped our understanding is of what constitutes biblical faith. Everything seems to suggest that we are not to expect the fulfillment now. Can we live like that? Have school and college prepared us to live with deferring a gratification and fulfillment now in the expectation that it will come after? Are we so confident that there is going to be a resurrection from the dead? And that we will not die disappointed if the promise does not come now, because we are superbly assured it will come *after*? It is worth waiting for, and it will affect not only how we die, but also how we live. We know we are in *this* faith by how we live *now*.

The Promises of God

> All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (v 13)

The promise has got to do with the establishment of specific statements God has made to the patriarchal fathers of the faith, for example, to David, that upon His throne would be seated a descendant from his loins who would rule over the house of Israel forever. We need to come into a Hebraic mentality that was reflected in the disciples who were with Jesus in His resurrection, when He spoke to them for forty days on the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. They asked Jesus, *"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6b). We have lost the sense of eternity in exact proportion to our having lost or never understood the issue of the Kingdom as a theocratic reality. The Kingdom has ever and always been the political rule of God in the earth; the law shall go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem. That may not mean much to us as 'modern' believers, but it has meant a great deal to generations of Jews who lived and waited for the fulfillment of that promise.

Abraham's looking for a City whose Builder and Maker is God is synonymous with looking for and hastening the coming theocratic Kingdom. The issue of God's Kingdom in terms of His ruling over His creation is the issue of God's glory. It is all the more to His glory that this rule will take place in the literal Land of Promise, and in the capital of that Land, Jerusalem, the city of peace, on the holy hill of Zion. If we do not have this perspective when we read these verses in the book of Hebrews, then our understanding will have a certain subjective meaning, but it is not the *full* meaning.

To desire Jesus, and to long for His appearing, are not to be understood as an emotional palpitation of the heart. It is the Lord coming to be vindicated in the very place where He was publicly humiliated, and where they put a sign up over His head in three languages, *"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"* as a mock, and gave Him a crown of thorns. In that place alone, He will establish His rule over His creation. To love God is to love Him in the sense of desiring to see the fulfillment of all that is rightly His, and which has been so long denied Him. Abraham understood this. It was the gospel that was preached to him, which contained a promise of a restoration that would establish God's glory, and be revealed through His rule over a creation that has long rejected Him, and distorted and destroyed the image of God in man. This is the hope and the promise, for which fulfillment men waited, but did not receive it in their lifetime. These all died not having received the promise.

How can we purport to be looking for Jesus and wanting to be with Him, and yet not have a concern or awareness of what it will be that eternally glorifies Him? I am uncomfortable with fascination for Jesus and a 'love' of Him in His own person that somehow does not take into consideration the things that eternally glorify Him. That is why both things are mentioned in the same chapter.

> All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (v 13)

The 'them' is plural as against seeing 'Him' who is invisible, something singular. Both things are true. It is not the pitting of one against the other, and I am appealing to you to see the issue of the Lord and His coming in the context of what His coming means, namely, the issue of His glory forever. The issues are worked out and enacted in the Last Days. And when they are completed, history is completed, and we move *out* of the dispensation of history and the times of the Gentiles, and into the millennial and eternal realm, which is to say, the thing that comes *after*. That is why it is only they who endure to the end who will be saved. Many are not enduring because they do not see the end, they do not expect the end, and they do not desire the end. They have not seen the faith in the eschatological, apocalyptic and theocratic setting, the very thing that God intends we should all see as being normative. That is what the word 'promise' refers to.

They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth. This changes our whole status, and our whole earthly tenure will be radically altered if we really embrace this view. How many Christians see themselves, desire to be, or are seen by others as

being pilgrims, strangers and sojourners in the earth? This must be an inevitable consequence of the embracing of this view in truth. ‘Pilgrim’ and ‘stranger’ suggest that one is not likely to be popular. One will never be comfortable in the world. You will be chafed by it, you can never succeed in it, or be at home in it. You are always looking for something beyond and other. It is a prickly feeling to be strange, because everything in modern society is trying to win you to feel like others, to be accepted and approved. But to feel odd and strange, and never able comfortably to fit in, is not something that is gratifying for the flesh.

The drift and main theme of our modern evangelism is this world and this present life orientated, for the benefits one receives. I can hardly imagine that anyone who is ‘saved’ on that basis is saved on a foundation that will enable them to endure and overcome until the end. It may well be that the whole carnal character of the church, and the tremendous fall-out rate, has something to do with the kind of message that people are hearing from their inception into the things of God. It is not centered in an eternal view of the kind that Paul had.

Have you noticed how some minister is called to initiate the sessions of Congress by opening in prayer? There is a kind of dalliance between the world and the church by which we sanctify and endorse this present world. We do not challenge its assumptions, or bringing to the attention of the world that its time is limited, and that God has established a Day in which He will judge all men; that this world is under judgment, and that God is not slack concerning His promise that the Day of the Lord will come, but He is not willing that any should perish. In not voicing that message, and condescending to bring a ‘religious’ dimension to the secular world (for which we get tax-deductible benefit), we reinforce the world in its lie. We allow them to go on without any consciousness of eternity or the eternal issues of heaven and hell. We ourselves are not that persuaded of heaven, and therefore we are not equally able to persuade men of hell. If eternity is only a category and not a passionate conviction, then we have no message for the world. And if the church is not evangelistic in the apostolic sense, then how is it the church? One of the principal functions of the church is to proclaim the gospel of this Kingdom. That includes proclaiming the message of judgment, but few of us have a stomach for being ‘strange’ and being looked upon differently, not only in the world, but even by other Christians.

Our True Dwelling Place

When God gathers up His elect, He will gather them up *"from the four corners of heaven."* That does not mean we are going to be in another stratosphere. Both will be situated on *terra firma*, but both will be *dwelling* in two radically and diametrically opposed places. One will dwell *in* the earth, they will look down for their gratification now—earthlings. The others are those who dwell *in* heaven while they are yet *in* the earth. They are looking for the City whose builder is God. Their eye is suffused with the things that are unseen and eternal.

Jesus had a conversation once with a ruler of the Jews, a man by the name of Nicodemus, the epitome of Jewish, religious ability, morality and ethics. If there was no God, then what Nicodemus represented was the perfect answer for human ideals. But there was another Man in whom he was in conversation, who represented something altogether 'other' than what Nicodemus was. He was the Man from heaven, Jesus the Christ. Nicodemus sensed something about Jesus that exploded all of his religious categories. And though he could not understand Him, he was probing to find out, lest he missed it:

> "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." (John 3:2b)

It was the earthly man asking earthly questions, and he received heavenly answers from the heavenly place by a heavenly Man,

> "And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven." (John 3:13)

In other words, Jesus is letting Nicodemus know, that although they may be physically in Jerusalem, He was Himself in heaven. Jesus was explaining to him what reality really is. Are we bewildered? That means that we are more identified with Nicodemus than we are with Jesus. How can a Man be standing in Jerusalem, and say that He is in heaven. If we do not yet understand that, then we have not yet attained to biblical faith. Faith takes the ordinary and mundane and brings to it the quality of eternity now. It makes the profane sacred, and it brings eternity into time. It is for the absence of this that mankind is freaking out. Mankind was created in God's image to live in the dimension that I am now describing. We were created to live in righteousness, truth, love and reality, but the world is so removed from God and His categories and dimensions that it has become stunted, and thinks that everything of consequence is in this present world. It is a contorted and restricted living that is not a true living at all. The ministry of the church is to demonstrate the message of a Kingdom of God that is at hand, "Look, here it is! Look at the reality. Look at a people who are completely free from intimidation, fear, anxiety and distress!" Just seeing our peace would be shattering for those who are unglued by what is happening in the world.

> "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3b), and then, "Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

We may well ask what relationship Jesus' answers had to Nicodemus' questions, and the answer is *nothing*, and it does not have to. We are not obliged to give earthly answers to earthly questions, but only heavenly answers, even if it leaves men bewildered!

The Afflictions of the Saints

As we have said, Paul saw the eternal weight of glory that made his present afflictions both momentary and light. Here is a seeing that affects the present in a very tangible and substantial way. This is an end-time provision of God, lest we become cowards, and be made fearful, or be compromised in the faith for the fear of pain and suffering. There are saints who actually went with rejoicing to the stake to be burned alive. They saw it as the logic, the conclusion, and the verification of their true faith. They rejoiced that their life had to end this way, and now they were assured of the crown. They were already rejoicing in the anticipation of the reward that they hardly felt the flames.

This is the faith to which we are called. It is a calling to be focused on the things that are invisible and eternal. It is a choice that we make every day, every hour and every moment. Where do we allow our eyes to rest and to dwell? Eyes are the organs of the senses; they want so much to be gratified; they want to see and look like something different. But it is sensual, earthly, carnal, and devilish absorption. God's call is to *look up,* and to see the things that are invisible and eternal. The eternal weight of glory, which is to say, the eternal reward, is ours in the measure of our willingness to enter into the sufferings of Christ. Redemptive sufferings precede the glory, and the glory will be to the degree that we bear the sufferings. In fact, if we intend to have this apostolic mindset and view, we are making ourselves candidates for suffering in one form or another. We will be a marked people before the principalities and powers of the air, and they will test us, and God will allow the testings. He employs the Devil's devices for the good. If the Devil inflicts suffering upon the saints because they are entertaining apostolic and eternal things, then the greater the glory and the character that is shaped and worked by the bearing of it. The patience and the long-suffering that are wrought in us are only possible *"for the joy that is set before us."* God is not calling us to some kind of masochism, where we bravely suffer for the sake of suffering, but we bear it because we anticipate the glory that is to come. The greater the suffering, the greater the weight of glory.

The Eternal Mindset

The utter conviction of the centrality and significance of eternity is central to the apostolic and Abrahamic faith, which means that this present life is only preparatory and transient. It is a whole reversal of values, and the things the world has sought to induct us into. In fact, if we talk about this life as preparation, and that suffering is a necessary ingredient in that preparation, and that the reward and the full significance for our being comes in the life to come, then we will be viewed as being medieval. Yet this *is* the biblical faith.

> And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. (v 15)

Paul means not only the country, but also the values of the country and the things that are celebrated in this present world. We have got to fight for this eternal view because it is daily threatened and contended against.

> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. (v 16)

We are chastened in *this* life for the life *to come*, because in the life to come there is no chastening work, in my opinion, at all. It is in this life that this preparation is performed,

> Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards (my emphasis) it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble; and make straight paths for your feet … . (Hebrews 12:10–13a)

Notice the practical implication now because you believe that for then.

> … so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (v 13b–17)

The intention of the Holy Spirit in these words is entirely eschatological. The whole gist and meaning, using Esau as an example, is to bring us into the alertness and awareness, that the preparation of this life is for the eternal, and that *this* is the inheritance that comes *after*. Esau was unable to deny himself a meal. In fact, he thought he would die if he did not get that meal. He was so rooted in immediate gratification that he could not even defer and set back for a later time the gratification that he had to have now.

The whole purpose of discipline or chastisement, which is to say, the painful dealings of God against our flesh, is to break the power of the need to be gratified now. The definition of a son is one who can defer his gratification for the reward that comes *after*. You do not need to receive a pat on the back after you have preached, "Well done, that was a great message!" A lot of us will collapse at this point, and compromise our message, even fishing for the compliments and the acknowledgments of men. Only a son can give total obedience to delivering the word without in any way modulating it so as to

receive the gratification of applause and affirmation. If you want to see God and obtain His holiness, then this is the way.

Look at Chapter 10 of Hebrews. Paul is talking about the suffering of saints and about the great conflict of sufferings,

> But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of suffering, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. (vv 32–34)

These saints, of whom Paul is referring, took joyfully the seizure of their property. It is one thing to bear it with a kind of resignation, but how can you *rejoice* for the loss? Only on one basis, namely, they knew in themselves that they had in heaven a better and abiding possession in exact proportion to what was lost. They *knew* it in themselves as a conviction, which is a knowing that is beyond mere doctrinal acknowledgment, and the proof of their knowing was that they took the seizure *joyfully*. Their joy was the statement of their faith in the most acute moment of being stripped. They were a people free from fear and intimidation, and the issue of security and possession. We can know whether eternity is just an abstraction or the deepest reality by our reaction to being stripped of our earthly goods. The latter evidences itself in a joyful surrendering. There is a difference between bearing something with a brave kind of resignation, as opposed to *counting it all joy*. Joy cannot be feigned. It is a heavenly quality, not some kind of human happiness. They knew in themselves, really knew, that they had a better and abiding possession in heaven beyond the proportion they lost. A faith that is not eschatological, that does not expect heavenly reward, and that does not look upon eternity as the greater and enduring reality, is not biblical faith.

Jesus Himself died with these words on His mouth, *"My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?"* He was stripped of *everything*—in hope of the joy that was set before Him.

> Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. (vv 35–36)

In other words, they did not receive, nor did they expect to receive, the promise until *after* they had done the will of God. That is a strange thing to consider. It means they did not receive in this life the thing for which they gave themselves totally to God. They did not receive the thing for which they were striving in God. If we are to be joined with them in the same quality of faith, then we will need to radically reconsider what we are presently about. It means we can serve God tirelessly and totally, without having to have our reward in this life. The world and its rewards do not move us. We cannot be wooed

and seduced by honorary doctorates. There is so much religious ambition, where men have to succeed *now*, have to be rewarded *now*, have to be acknowledged *now, now, now*.

We do not see the hidden saints, who can serve God without being recognized and known by men. We need rather to be joined with the saints that have gone before us instead of looking for the reward that men can bestow presently. With every reward that is presently bestowed by men, there is an appropriate compromise in our integrity, in the quality of our faith, and in the quality of our witness and service to God. The true children of God do not move to the cues of men. They do not respond according to the things that make for religious success *now.* They look to something that is eternal and has a greater reward, and therefore they allow God to ruthlessly deal with them, removing any impulse that wants to be recognized by men *now*, that wants success *now*. They, and we, will receive our reward at the same time Abraham receives it, namely, in the Day of eternity—at the Lord's coming.

> For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. (v 37)

How then Should We Live Now?

Jesus' coming will usher in the Day of eternity and the reward. It was written two thousand years ago, but the Lord has not come, and yet how could Paul say, "in a little while"? Was Paul guilty of exaggeration? For Paul it was little, in the same way that his afflictions were both momentary and light. It was little because he already anticipated eternity at the door. It was not an issue of chronology, but an issue of God's character. He who promised *will* come. It is an issue of the God who promises.

Here comes the punch-line,

> ***Now*** (emphasis mine) the just shall live by faith. (v 38 kjv)

Having just spoken about what comes *after*—the inheritance, eternity and the reward—Paul brings the subject to the immediate, *"Now the just shall live by faith."* In other words, "Now the just shall live by this eschatological faith." Will the Lord find *this* kind of faith upon the earth when He returns? It is the faith of His coming, the faith of His appearing, the faith of His Kingdom, and the faith of the fulfillment of all these promises—and He asks us to live by it now. How do we live now that is *really* living and not just 'getting by'? How do we live joyfully now, because anything other than that is not living? Everything that Paul said comes to bear now, and that is what I love about God. This is the paradox of the faith. Having spoken all of those things about *afterwards*, He comes to *now*. And now is not now, except in the light of what comes *after*. Now is *only* now because of what comes after. Now can be lived as now dynamically because of what comes after. Now would not be now without the promise and the reward, and He who made it. Now is only now because God is God. Now we can live by faith in the

anticipation and confidence of the recompense of the reward that comes after. It gives us the incentive to serve God *now*, and which also eclipses every present reward:

> But just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

There is a crown to be won and a treasure that is being laid up. The key to apostolic lifestyle and living, and prophetic seeing and being, and of courage and overcoming *now* is because of what comes *after*. This alone *is* the faith once and for all given to the saints for which we need earnestly to contend! Faith is a mode of living that has taken into its deepest consciousness the eschatological, apocalyptic expectation of the end of the age in its theocratic promise, and that transforms, therefore, our quality of life *now*.

We are moving toward a consummation and a hope. What we are now, and how we walk now, are altogether related to what we anticipate for the future. Furthermore, we have a foretaste now of the power and the glory of the age to come *by the Holy Spirit*. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a token, a down payment, and a foretaste of the powers of the age to come. One of the terrible things wrong with the Charismatic and allied movements is that they have not seen the Holy Spirit in His eschatological context. They have seen the Holy Spirit only as a present phenomenon, as if it is the whole thing already that has been poured out on all flesh, when it is hardly more than a sprinkling. The baptism has been seen as something to renew our denominations, and to bring a degree of titillation and excitement into an otherwise dull Christian life. It amazes me that God's fist did not come down on the whole Charismatic thing and blot it out in a moment. It borders on being sacrilegious, a misuse of the Spirit, and likely even a misappropriation, because it does not see Him in the context of God's intention, being only a token, a down payment and a foretaste of the powers of the age to come. God wants to whet our appetites in anticipation of the thing that is future, enduring and eternal.

Eternal Reward

The concept of eternal reward is virtually absent from the consideration of modern Christendom. It was foremost, though, in the consideration of the apostolic generation. Paul strove to obtain the reward, and therefore it is not something to be despised, but rather we should earnestly seek to restore this understanding. It is a remarkably glorious theme that has been historically lost to us, and yet is central to the whole faith. The principalities and powers of the air profoundly resist this subject, because to lay hold of the issues of eternity opens up a whole dimension of release in the church that makes it a qualitatively different proposition, both in the world and toward the powers of this world.

Are we awaiting the Lord's coming as a piece of doctrinal correctness, as an inevitable historical necessity, as something that will be for us an escape from a tribulation that we

do not want to bear? Or is He someone who is coming to give us the reward appropriate to our service and sacrifice? It makes a great deal of difference, because it determines and influences how we live *now*. What will sustain us in a time of persecution? How will we stand under it and not collapse? How will we bear that remarkable oppression if we do not have an expectation of a reward? The reward is God's 'nuts and bolts,' end-time provision for enduring and overcoming. I do not believe that any believer can really overcome, except that he has this as a lively and powerful incentive in truth in his heart and spirit.

> Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. (Revelation 22:12)

The rewards, our place in the heavenlies, and our relationship with the Lord in the millennial Kingdom in ruling and reigning with Him, are proportionate to the quality and kind of our labor and service in *this* life. The fact that some will rule over two cities, some over five, some over ten and some will not rule over any, shows that there are degrees of reward. Ruling and reigning with Christ is the right to perform righteous judgments. Judgment is not a judicial application of the Law, but bringing the wisdom of God to bear into a situation that needs it. We come to that place of stature and maturity to exercise those judgments out of the character and stature obtained in *this* life.

> Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (1 Corinthians 3:8)
>
> Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 8:13–15)

The issue of eternal distinction is totally individual, and completely a matter of our own desire. It is what you yourself have accomplished, or done in this life, by the grace of God that is given, in proportion to our willingness to undertake and perform the works of God. Not every work is God's work. Merely because it is religious, 'spiritual,' or because we are fulfilling a need, does not mean that that work will earn for us honor, reward, or distinction. We may well come to experience that many of our works will be burned up, being hay, wood and stubble, rather than gold, silver or precious gems. The reward will be based on what is accomplished in this life in works that pass the fire. Only that which passes through the fire—because fire tests the works—qualifies for eternal reward. The works of God are those that have their inception in Him, and are performed in the power of His life, by motives that are pure, and that seek His purposes only, and His glory. There *are* works to be performed, and if we do His works, we can expect retaliation and consequence against ourselves in a world that will become totally antichrist in the Last Days. Any significant work for God is the very kind of thing that is likely to bring upon

our head a counter reprisal. Only the expectation of reward for that work is the incentive that is likely to perform it.

> Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1)

It suggests that we can lose our reward, due to impure motives. If we want to be seen, recognized and honored by men in the doing, we therefore lose the corresponding eternal reward. It is the hope of that reward that will enable us to perform a work, even when people do not acknowledge it, or are not grateful for it. This is a complete reversal of the incentives that most men require in this life. They do because they want to be seen of men, recognized, and celebrated.

> Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11–12)

The joy of it is experienced *now*, in the moment of the shame and rejection. That is a living faith, because you anticipate the reward in such a way that it is a present factor in your joy. If our faith does not eventuate in joy in the moment that we suffer disgrace, reproach and rejection, for Christ's sake, then we have not the true faith. If we have just an academic faith or a doctrinal thing, then we will be quite glum.

The anticipation of the future thing, that is both enduring and eternal, and a reward that does not fade away, does not rust, does not corrupt, and cannot be stolen, is designed by God to be the most powerful, cogent motive for our present service. God intends it to be an enormous factor in our present overcoming life. This was a factor for Moses in his own overcoming, and his own separation from Egypt:

> By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24–26)

Paul said that we would all stand at the judgment seat of Christ, not to determine the issue of our salvation, but to determine the issue of our reward. It is there that our works are tested to see whether they can survive the fire of God's evaluation and judgment. When we say the phrase 'good works,' we automatically recoil, because we think that somehow it is threatening the gospel of grace. Salvation is a gift of God by grace, but what we do with the grace, having obtained it as a gift, determines our eternal place and eternal reward. Works is only a bad word when we think that we can labor for our salvation. Something should come from our faith, something visible, something productive, and this is what God weighs, evaluates and rewards in the Day of His coming.

The Mystery of Rewards

Neither will we all rise at the same time. Some of us will rise with the first resurrection of a first fruits kind, that is to say, those who will rule and reign with Him in His millennial Kingdom. Others will sleep through the Millennium, and only rise with the general resurrection of the dead that is described in Revelation Chapter 20, where the books will be opened, including the Book of life, to see if their names are written in it.

Some of us will not be equipped to rule and reign with Christ, because we have ignored, or forsaken, or have had no stomach for this kind of responsibility, though we *could* have obtained it in this life. Those Christians, who have been content to sit passively in fellowships their entire Christian life, because they were assured that they were "going to heaven," may well be profoundly disappointed. I would not want to miss the first resurrection, and that is why Paul is continually exhorting the saints to be found blameless in the Day of the Lord's appearing. We have an eternal incentive to obtain a distinctive reward of the high calling in Christ Jesus. Apparently it is not for everyone; for it says that the rest shall sleep:

> And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or the image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. (Revelation 20:4–5)

It is a remarkable reward for a remarkable service in a remarkable time of Last Days' oppression and persecution, where the greater number evidently could not stand in a faith that could resist succumbing to the mark of the Beast. The 'beheaded' are a people who will prefer to perish rather than take the mark, of which we are warned, that if we take it, we will be cast into the lake of fire with the Devil. God's judgment is severe over this one thing. I can almost hear the kinds of rationalizing that will come out of Christians as that time comes, "Well, I have got to live. I have got to buy and sell. What about my children? I have got responsibilities." There will be every kind of justification to succumb to a system by which our physical security will be assured. The other and wiser alternative is to take the risks of living independent of that in such a way, that if God will not provide, we would rather perish than survive on that other basis. For those who are willing for that kind of faith, God has a special reward, namely, the privilege of ruling and reigning with Him for a thousand years—while all the rest sleep.

In fact, taking the mark of the Beast does not happen in a final moment, but rather our daily choices make that taking inevitable. Hairstyle, earrings in the ear for men, music, soul sensations, and other kinds of things that Christians allow themselves, and think them harmless, are already a statement, a mark and an identification with the spirit of the

world in all its rebellion, anger and defiance. What you wear conveys something, and we do it because we cannot deny ourselves the enjoyment and sensual or soulish benefit that comes to us by those things.

A man once asked me what he could do to really serve the Lord with distinction. He wanted to go all the way. I told him that he could start with cutting his hair, and when he heard that, he shuddered and wept. There is something about the luxury of running our fingers through our curls and locks, and feeling the length of them, that has a resonance of something soulish. For others it may not be hair, but something else. It may not be sinful in itself, but it is already the unconscious taking of a mark, already an identification. Homosexuals and that whole pop and rock culture were some of the first to wear earrings in modern times. You yourself do not have to be a homosexual, but the earrings identify you as standing for that. If it even bears a resonance of being identified with the world, then avoid it. I would rather err by a radical separation from the thing that has the appearance of being in the worldly realm than to take the risk of unconsciously identifying with it. We should not assume we are so 'spiritual' that we can wear earrings, enjoy certain hairstyles and fashionable clothing, or listen to rock music. It is already a seduction and a lie to think that it will not affect us because of our 'higher' spirituality.

I would rather be called a legalist than take the risk of compromising, which will make me more and more partial to the spirit of the world. I believe and intuit that the mark of the Beast is already taking place invisibly, but indelibly. We are either taking the mark of the Beast, or the mark of the Father, and when the light comes, that is to say, the Day of the Lord, it will reveal by its light which mark we have consistently chosen. When our subsistence and life depend on whether we can buy or sell by taking the mark, then be assured, we *will* buy and sell. We will do it because we live for the keeping of our body and soul together.

Jesus Himself condemned as wicked those stewards who did not bring an increase to the talents that were given them. There is an enormous emphasis on freedom of will to do and to serve. Men can bury their talent, or they can multiply it, and there will be a proportionate reward, or a judgment, for the failure to bring increase. The church is not the church until it brings these perspectives into its present consideration. If we are not looking for that City and that reward, then of necessity we are going to be victims of seduction—especially in the religious realm.

The First Resurrection

> Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6)

The wording in these verses could not be clearer. The word 'first' implies that there is another resurrection to follow, and those that did not resurrect at the first resurrection are

‘the rest of the dead,’ whose resurrection is of another kind, and at a later time—nor will there be the same reward.

Here we see the character of those who preferred martyrdom to physical survival. They became blessed, holy and priestly *before* their resurrection. It is clear that not every saint is blessed, holy and priestly. This is the resurrection that Paul strove to obtain, and which we also need to strive for. We have missed the greatest incentive to be distinctive in this life, because if we are going to be blessed, holy and priestly eternally, then we need to be blessed, holy and priestly *here*. We cannot attain to this character without knowing the Cross in truth. We are not going to be blessed, holy and priestly, and at the same time give ourselves to the gratification of the flesh. It is going to take a disciplined and submitted life, and one that is submitted to other brethren. It is a life that will receive correction and not balk and react in resentment when it comes.

There is every human reluctance to walk in the light as He is in the light. We can be cowards and refuse to heed the Scripture that says, *"Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed."* We would rather struggle with the private, secret sin, and never overcome it. By confessing it before a brother, we break the power of the sin. Only then is it brought into the light. If we would take eternity into our consideration, we would find the courage to do it. Our choosing to live cowardly in this life will result in having to stand outside the gate of that Kingdom. It is not only the liars and gross sinners that are kept from that Kingdom, but also the cowardly. There is a whole dimension of things that need to come into our spirit and consciousness, our conduct and life, if we are going to be apostolically authentic. We cannot persuade men, knowing the terror of God, if we do not know the reward of eternity.

If this remains in the realm of abstraction and something that we can lightly consider or disregard, then we are condemning ourselves to an inevitable collapse under Last Days’ oppression. We will be robbed of eternal reward. The Day of Judgment is final. There is no occasion in the realm of eternity to change our character, our disposition, or place. Every single aspect of that issue is decided in *this* life.

Those who rise in the first resurrection are they, whom Jesus referred to when He said to Nathaniel,

> "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:51b)

They will have glorified bodies, and will move through fixed things, just as Jesus did in His glorified body, in their administration of the Kingdom. It is their privilege, and their reward is to be co-administrators with the Lord. This is not government as we traditionally know it., but rather a heavenly and divine rule, the goodness and wisdom of God teaching men how to live in righteousness, mediated in the meekness of the character of the Lamb. There is no higher honor than to rule and reign with Christ in His theocratic Kingdom. We do not have an earthly model of what this theocratic rule will mean. It was Jesus’ reward, for which a throne was prepared for Him. God not only

raised Him from the dead, but raised Him up on high, to a place of rule, where it says that all authority has been given Him both in heaven and in earth.

> And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11–15)

Just from a simple reading of that text, I would have to say that those who were not qualified to rise with the blessed, holy and priestly saints had to wait a thousand years. They missed the initiation of God's Kingdom, and any participation in it. The clear and literal deduction must include a number of those who *were* saved, but who lived lives without any significant distinction that would have earned them the reward of a first resurrection, and were therefore to be judged with all the other dead. They did not rise with the first resurrection, otherwise there would be no need to consult the Lamb's Book of Life. Those who rise in the first resurrection, and because of that rising, reveal the approval and acceptance of being found *in* Christ. Their walk, conduct, character and works qualify them for the resurrection. If we do not rise, then we have not qualified. We were not found worthy for that first resurrection. Paul said that he strove to obtain *that* resurrection. It is not automatic, but rather a 'being found worthy.' Those who are mature, those who are overcomers, those who have the character of Christ, who are *in* Christ, and who can hear His trump, will rise. Those who are not *in* Christ, who are immature, untested, unqualified and unworthy, will sleep for a thousand years.

Those whose names are found in the Lamb's Book of Life are going to be saved out of hell, and from being thrown into the Lake of Fire with all the rest of the dead, but I would not want to wait to see if my name was written. There is a possibility that it might have been written, and has since been blotted out. It was so paramount for Paul to qualify for that first resurrection. And we will never be blessed, holy or priestly—the qualifications for the first resurrection—unless we have the kind of determination that Paul had, namely, to be found worthy of that first resurrection.

> And the nations were enraged, and Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth. (Revelation 11:18)

Here is the judgment of God, destroying those who destroy, but giving reward both *small* and *great*. There is reward at every level, and at every grade, proportionate to the work and the investment. To be without reward will be an eternal shame.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

> For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds. (Matthew 16:27)

> And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each of you according to your deeds. (Revelation 2:23)

It is out of the mouth of the Lord Himself, showing again that it is an individual matter.

> For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10–11)

Here we see one of the principal incentives to walk in a particular way in this life with regard to our body, our mouth, our feet, our hands and our minds. What do we give our minds to? What kind of thoughts do we allow that we think we have the luxury to contemplate, even though no one else hears them or sees them? It is still done in our body.

> But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Romans 14:10)

If we know that we are going to stand before God and give account, then we should not ourselves be disposed to be judgmental. That is the meaning of the Scripture that says, "Do not judge." Those who judge themselves need not be judged of God. We need to be ruthless with ourselves and really examine our hearts and ask the Lord for illumination and light, and want to see the truth of our condition, and to be broken for it, and repent for it *now*. We will not have to stand before Him *then* with our shabby lives.

> He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before his angels. (Revelation 3:5)

In other words, names will be blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life. This is a jolt to the 'eternal security' doctrine that many in the church have thought for themselves, but helps to explain the slack attitude that is to be found in churches around the world, where there

is an unwillingness for the sacrifice required for overcoming or obtaining a priestly stature in God, and thinking that somehow we will have the same heaven, the same resurrection, and the same reward as everyone else. The Scriptures show that God gives reward proportionate to the quality of character and service performed and obtained in *this* life. We may well find that when we stand before Him, who is Truth, that there might be another eternal verdict different from what we had naively expected, and in that moment and from thenceforth, there is no alteration or remedy—it is eternally fixed.

The Millennial Kingdom

We would be discussing this subject in a vacuum unless we have come to an agreement about one principal thing, namely, that the whole issue of eternal reward is set in one particular context: the millennial Kingdom. The establishment of this Kingdom will be thrilling beyond all measure. It will not be some rudimentary filing of papers, or bureaucracy, but the creative setting forth and establishing of a Kingdom of righteousness for the first time in creation. The law of the Lord shall go out from Jerusalem to the nations, and the nations shall learn righteousness. It will take, therefore, men and women who are skilled in the issues of righteousness, and who know how to bring benevolent influence to those who are hearing of it for a first time. They will be doing that, in my opinion, in their glorified bodies, ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, and being directed to cities and to fellowships that have been springing forth on the earth under Israel's influence and witness as *the evangelistic nation*.

There is remarkably little in Scripture that describes what this Kingdom will be. The greatest description of Israel's millennial glory is probably in the book of Isaiah, and certain of the other prophets. For example, she will be named by a new name. Her people will be called the ministers of the Lord. Nations will come to her. She will be a diadem and crown in the hand of the Lord. The language is lavish to describe what this nation will be in the Millennium, so what then will the Millennium itself be? Restored Israel is not the administrator of that Kingdom, but the *subject* of it. The risen glorified church administers the Kingdom. It is the church who rule and reign with Christ. Israel will be the subjects of the Kingdom as much as they were under King David. This time they will be subjects under the Greater King David (Jesus), who will be their Prince and Ruler forever. They will make known the Kingdom in the same sense that the church today promulgates the gospel of the Kingdom, but the actual administration, the governing, the establishment of this rule of God in the earth is reserved as a privilege for a church of a particular kind. She has established her claim and credential to be co-rulers, and to rule and reign by virtue of her sacrifice, character and conduct in the earth.

Our earthly tenure is to be trained for this rule, and to demonstrate our ability and qualification for that millennial and eternal privilege. To take this one thing to heart would transform everything. Every force in hell militates against this understanding, and wants to keep the church in its present lackluster, uninspired and matter-of-fact condition, because if it remains like that, it is not likely to rise in the first resurrection. It will not

respond to the trumpet of God, and to the voice of the Lord, for it did not respond to His voice in this life. Those who rise with Christ are those who are *in* Christ. The Devil wants to rob us of an incentive that would make all the difference eternally. He does not want to see the Kingdom come because the establishment of that Kingdom means the end of his false, usurping rule.

By the time that the early church had become Catholic and universal, virtually all references to the millennial Kingdom had been removed. To this day, the Catholic Church sees itself as the Kingdom. Catholicism is amillenial, that is to say, it does not anticipate a Kingdom to come, but sees itself *as* the Kingdom come, and the capital of that Kingdom is Rome, not Jerusalem. Though there has been a Protestant Reformation, it was not a thorough and total reformation, and this issue had never been touched by church fathers like Calvin and Luther. It is a strange phenomenon that these great giants of the faith were eschatologically ignorant. They would no doubt have thought that the Protestant Reformation was the coming to the end of the age of human history; that the Pope was the Antichrist, and that the Protestants represented the new Kingdom. There was, therefore, no need for a ‘coming’ Millennium.

The expectation of a ‘Kingdom come,’ a literal, political rule of God over His creation, is actually the promise for which the great saints of old sacrificed, suffered and died. They were heirs to the promise, namely, the promise of their Kingdom, which was also their glory and honor. The church needs rightly to see that, because unless it does, we cannot talk about eternal reward. All eternal reward is millennial reward, and participation in that millennial Kingdom. If we cannot conceive of that Kingdom, and have no anticipation for it, and think of it only as an abstraction, and do not have a faith to believe for it, then the talk of reward is altogether vain. That ancient cry of the church, "Come, Lord Jesus" was "Thy Kingdom come," for when He comes, He comes as King. It should also be *our* hope, as it was for the early church, and it would, therefore, be an incentive to be found blameless and worthy at the Day of His coming.

It sounds far fetched and fanciful, and the tendency of most believers is to disregard it and say, "Well if it is going to happen, it is going to happen. Why do I have to take this into my consideration *now*?" That attitude assures us we will not be there at that first resurrection, but have to sleep a thousand years, and rise with the unregenerate dead, and stand before the Judge in a fearful moment, to see whether our names are indeed even in the Book of Life. If they are found, we will be without any distinction or reward. The thing that marks the church as being peculiar is that it takes the *future* into its *present* consideration. It does not merely acknowledge that something is going to happen eternally, but takes the eternal thing into its present thought, which, in turn, brings that eternal thing to a quicker conclusion, and makes the preparation for it more likely.

The only judgment that those who are alive at His coming face, then, is an assessment of their works, because that will determine whether they will rule over five cities or ten. Are we building with hay, wood and stubble, or gold, silver and precious stones? What we have built with is determined by our motivation. Is our motivation success, or popularity, or is it faithful obedience, to be unknown, unsung, unheralded, and just to serve the Lord

in the things to which we have been called, and for which we have been given talent, and to grow in that, so that we might hear, "Well done faithful servant."? In whatever small thing we labored, we labored in it authentically and truly. Our motives were pure; it was unto the Lord. We did it as good stewards, multiplying what little it was, with which we began, and that work will stand the test of the fire. It is built on a true foundation that no man can lay. The work that is founded on this foundation will be of the same character and kind, because the work will not be out of our energy, but out of divine inspiration in the fulfillment of His will. It will be accomplished out of His energy and ability, which is to say, His resurrection life. Only *that* is a true work. When we do something out of our own human energy, even though we do it for the Lord, it is totally unacceptable to Him. Everything must be *of* Him, *through* Him in order that it might be glory *unto* Him forever. The whole key is being dead and hidden with Christ in God. It is a humiliation to be dead, and if we are not willing for that risk, we cannot expect that our works will endure.

The Invisible Cloud of Witnesses

> Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

In the trying moments that are future, when there will be real conflict, it is a great assurance and comfort to know that the saints who have preceded us, in this very same precious faith, are waiting for us to come to the finish line. They have not yet received their reward, because they are not yet made perfect without us. They are present in an invisible cloud, and exert from that place a positive influence to help us on, and through, to the conclusion of the race that is set before us. They are a vital ingredient of a very particular kind for the purpose of facilitating the conclusion of the age *through* us. We are in a continuum with all of the saints who have preceded us, and who were of *this* faith, and we are moving toward a glorious conclusion. To see ourselves in that faith, now and presently, and in that context, is true seeing. We are in something together that links the past with the eternal future. We are in time, looking to that end, which end is soon to be upon us. We are moving toward something to which they have already sacrificed and given themselves, but will not be *obtained* independent of us. They are waiting for the fulfillment, *and we are the Last Days' actors*.

Entering His Rest

In the book of Hebrews, Paul gives an illustration or type from the Old Testament of those who failed to enter into the rest, that goes back to Israel in the wilderness. Everyone who came out of Egypt, and into the wilderness, came under the blood of the lamb, and

passed through the waters of baptism *into* Moses. That whole generation, except for two, rotted in the wilderness. They failed to enter into the rest that God had prepared. God has made them a type and an example for us, upon whom the ends of the age have come. It is a very sober warning, for it is apparent that we can come under the blood of the Lamb, and pass through the waters of baptism, and yet these are no assurance that we will enter the Land of Promise. The Land of Promise is a type or symbol of the Kingdom of God, for that is where the Kingdom, its crown and throne are established. They were forbidden, however, to enter because of their lack of faith. In other words, they did not have the anticipation or desire.

> And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! And why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" (Numbers 14:2-3).

They actually despised the Land of Promise in the same way that we can despise the eternal reward. We can nod our heads and say, "Yes, I believe in eternal reward."— but we do it in such a way that it is not taken to heart. We do not *long* for that distinction, reward and privilege. It is the same as despising it, and counting it of little consequence.

Moses pleaded with God not to blot out the nation for their lack of faith and murmuring, even though they did not want to contemplate the difficulty of what coming into that Land would require. Those who enter are they who share the humiliation and suffering of the Lord. Going through the wilderness into the Land of Promise, and fighting all of the Canaanite cities, and overcoming them, is not a picnic, but a struggle and a suffering. It is one, however, that we will not make unless we will believe the Land is an exceedingly great reward. The people of Israel did not think it sufficient compensation for the sacrifice they knew they would be required to make. They preferred rather to go back to Egypt, and be under bondage again, than to take the risks of having to work their way through a wilderness to enter a Land of Promise.

> But my servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it (Numbers 14:24).

I do not believe that it means the literal, physical descendants of Caleb, but those who are of like mind, heart, and spirit with him. He wanted the *entire* reward. Those who are casual are not of the seed of Caleb, and will not share in the reward. This is something we freely choose. Shallowness and complacency are not something we are victims of by virtue of our temperament. We can *desire* a fervent spirit and a wholeheartedness toward God. Indeed, if we are not wholehearted, we need not think we will be fitted to rule and reign with Christ. We may not be eternally lost, but we disqualify ourselves.

> Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years (Hebrews 3:8-9).

Israel provoked the Lord because they despised the excellent Land, and were not willing for the sacrifice to enter it.

> Therefore I was angry with this generation, and said, "They always go astray in their heart; and they did not know My ways"; as I swore in My wrath, "They shall not enter My rest." Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God (Hebrews 3:10-12).

In other words, take care lest you also be half-hearted, lest you also be unwilling to obtain the full measure.

> For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end (v 14).

That is to say, we have become partakers of His Kingdom and reign, but only if we hold fast, and not give up to live a less demanding quality of life.

> And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief. (vv 18–19)

Believing is more than doctrine. They did not have a *heart* for that which God was making available. They did not embrace the faith as it was presented to them.

> Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. (Hebrews 4:1)

If God did that with Israel, then how do we think that we will be exempt from suffering the same kind of eternal penalty, if we also despise the Land of Promise? The word *promise* almost always points to the coming of His Kingdom. These all died not having received the promise, that is to say, the promise of His Kingdom and its glory. ‘To come short of it’ does not mean that you lose your salvation, but it is the reward that is lost. You come short of what might have been your eternal joy as a reward.

> For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (v 2)

They heard the report of the spies, but they did not hear it with faith; it did not, therefore, profit them. We can hear something, and be just as guilty, if it is not mixed with faith. There is something required from us. God preaches the word, but the word is without

profit unless something comes out from us to receive it, and take it to heart, and to turn it into something.

Faith is not faith in the sense of a compendium of doctrines that constitute ‘the faith,’ but a disposition of spirit that wants to activate and realize the thing that is being spoken. The Israelites of that time had no intention, or desire, to walk it out, or see it fulfilled. God therefore condemns them, because it was something in which *they* failed, not something in which *God* failed. He gave them everything: The Land of Promise was there. The good report was given. The word was preached, but they failed and refused to receive the word so as to do it, and therefore His anger was kindled against them. His warning to us is,

> Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. (Hebrews 4:1)
>
> For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. (v 3)

They were an unsanctified people that came out of Egypt. They did not have a pure or whole heart as had Caleb. Being brought out of bondage does not give you entry into the Promised Land. They could not believe for the future that lay beyond the Jordan, that was spoken of as a promise, and described as a goodly Land. It is exactly the same with God’s people today, that is to say, we have neither a millennial or eternal expectation. We have no sense of that future or desire for it. We are rooted in the present. We can believe for the ‘manna’ that comes down *now*, but we cannot believe for the thing that is future, distant or eternal. The failure to believe was the disqualification for entering the Land, and it will be exactly the same for us. Not to believe for eternity is to be excluded from it.

In their grumbling, the Israelites showed something that revealed where they in fact *were*, and where we in fact *are*, for exactly the same reason.

> And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! And why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" (Numbers 14:2–3)

In other words, "Let us go back to Egypt for security, garlic and leeks, sensual delight and gratification." Those who refused to enter were occupied only with their own well-being, security and gratification. Those who were willing for the sacrifice of going through the wilderness to enter the Promised Land were occupied with the glory of God. The ‘Kingdom come’ is the issue of God’s glory, and if we are preoccupied with our own security, comfort and gratification, we will prefer Egypt, though we might not say it in so many words. The thing that preoccupied Caleb and Joshua, as against the multitude of Israel, was decidedly different in its motive. One was for the gratification of the flesh and

self, and the other was the glory of God. The coming into the Promised Land was not for the benefit that would accrue to them, but the glory that would accrue to God.

> Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1Corinthians 6:9–10)

Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church. They were already marked by moral failure in a really vile way, and he is making clear to them, that if they are going to be characterized by unrighteousness and fornication, they will not inherit the Kingdom of God. It is not an admonition to unbelievers, who are already in a place of deception. Believers need to know that they can be just as deceived to think that they will have automatic inheritance in the Kingdom.

Excommunication

Excommunication from fellowship does not mean anything today. We can flit from fellowship to fellowship without a question being asked. To be expelled and excommunicated in apostolic times was to be totally cut off from the fellowship of the saints. It was such a feared penalty, because it was a preview of what expulsion from the Kingdom would mean *eternally*. Outer darkness is not a pleasant thing to contemplate. You may be saved out of a fire of hell, but you are cut off from an eternal fellowship with the saints of God and the overcomers of God. In His mercy, God has installed *in this life* something of what that eternal penalty will be, namely, excommunication. If your sin is worthy of excommunication, you are also a candidate for expulsion from the Kingdom of God.

There is a remarkable responsibility for the church in effecting issues of eternity *in this present life* by whether they recognize a repentance that will enable men's sins to be forgiven, or that they need to be retained, because if they are retained here, they are retained in heaven. If they are excommunicated *here*, then they are excommunicated *there*. The church has always been the agent God intended to determine where men would occupy themselves in eternity. If God excluded an entire Israel from entering for their unbelief, then how will He fall short of excluding believers, for the same reason, to their eternal lament? In the moment of eternity, we will find out that what we dismissed or despised is actually true, and now, we have forfeited something eternally, and it cannot be remedied. We are fixed permanently in the outer darkness, not only without reward, but also without fellowship of a kind that would have made eternity a joy. "*Exhort one another daily, lest any one of you falls short*" is the exhortation of God. We will not be to each other what we need to be unless we see this in the eternal context.

The Apocalyptic View and the 'Blessed Hope' of the Church

God has intended for the church in every generation to have the dynamic of apocalyptic expectancy as normative to true church. Apocalyptic expectancy was to resonate in the church. It was to be a dynamic of expecting and waiting characteristic of the church in *every* generation. The issue is not chronology, but the faithfulness of the God who promised His return. The church does not have a vivid sense that we are moving toward 'an end,' which in fact will be a new beginning.

The apocalyptic mindset is the belief that the power of evil or Satan, who is now in control of this temporal and hopelessly evil age of human, is soon to be overcome, and his evil rule ended by the direct intervention of God. Right now, though, the righteous are afflicted by his demonic and human agents. There is something about demonic influence that people do not want to consider, or at best, they might want to consider it in terms of certain individuals who need deliverance, but they do not want to view life and reality in the world as being under the influence of Satan. The Scriptures tell us that the whole world lies in the power of the Evil One. The only end for such a world is his being unseated in a final defeat, and a casting out, and God Himself coming to establish a Kingdom of His own righteousness. This is too utterly supernatural for the consideration of most rational Christians. What is even more offensive is that the capital of that Kingdom is in a place where many would not have ever desired for it to be, namely, Jerusalem, in a restored Israel. *Everything* that God does is calculated to offend human sensibility. He knows exactly where men are vulnerable, and He always appoints things that are scandalous for human consideration.

The most offensive of messages to communicate is to tell those who dwell on the earth that their time is soon up; that this world is under judgment; that its end is near; that there is a coming fire and that they had better know *now* the Coming King. In the Day of His coming, it will be too late to make His acquaintance, for He is coming as Judge not Savior. Everything that men do in the world suggests perpetuity, not an end. We bear, therefore, an unwelcome message where men will again put their fingers in their ears. Furthermore, if we preach it in apostolic power and anointing, men will rush upon us with teeth bared. In fact, any gospel that is not apocalyptic is not the gospel. It has been denuded and robbed; a vital content and dynamic has been lost. There is something about the apocalyptic view that brought, to the early church, a particular urgency, an expectation and a hope.

> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. (Titus 2:11–15)

This is another one of those great, apostolic summations of the faith. It seems almost to be a paradox to have an anticipation of a cosmic event, namely, the Lord's appearing, and the coming of another Kingdom. And while we are waiting, we do not 'mark time,' but are zealous for good works, because that has also an eternal application. For example, denying worldly lusts. There *is* an ethic. To have this view brings certain requirements in this present life. We are living in a transitory time, loaded with great purposes, but it is lived in the expectation of this great conclusion to the age. The final witness of the church in all the increasing darkness is that it will be an increasing light. It is God's final mercy, that if anyone yet wants to be saved from eternal darkness, there are here and there, sprinkled over the earth, centers of light to which they could come. If they refuse *that* witness, they are refusing a last grace of God being offered to a dying world. The church has, therefore, all the more obligation to live blamelessly and without reproach.

There is something about eternity, and the anticipation and hope that comes, that the enemy wants bitterly to resist, because it brings a dimension of a dynamic into the church that threatens the vested interests of the powers of darkness. The apocalyptic faith is the one that *expects* a termination of this world and the establishment of another. It is this *other* that will go on eternally, and this is the cosmic triumph of God against the powers of darkness, who have historically ruled or misruled over His creation. The Lord's coming marks their final defeat, the establishment of His Kingdom in glory, and the vindication of His patient saints, who have endured the wrath of the opposing forces of darkness in their final fury. It brings the restoration of Israel in the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises to her, the tabernacle of David is restored, and the rule of God goes out to the nations. It is a whole scenario, a whole climactic conclusion that is more or less lost to the church, even while we think we have it. Merely to talk about the coming of the Lord as a doctrinal truth, or an escape from grim times of tribulation, is not to hold the faith as a blessed hope.

"The present age" implies that there is another coming. Denying worldly lusts does not mean avoiding sexual orgies. A lust is any desire that has not its origin from above, which is to say, God Himself is not the Author of it. By that definition, a lust could be anything as innocuous as a merchandising catalog. If you are moved by it, rather than by God, then it is a lust that has its origin from below. We are to deny it, and that will be painful, because *any* denial is painful. There is a power in merchandise that is seductive, and that seeks to pull us into its vortex. There is something about the opulence, variety and stimulation that comes from merchandise to robs us of the eternal perspective. There is even a way in which we 'legitimize' desire and lust, but it will captivate the soul. We become familiar to seeing it, and to others approving it, or using it, or wearing it, until by gradations, there is a way in which the world has an increasing influence upon our life and the dulling of our spirits.

To live soberly is also to live with a careful eye about what you allow yourself, that would have an injurious effect upon your spirit. Even the way in which food is exhibited in a supermarket is established by psychologists and experts, so as to arrange the shelves to meet the eye of the casual shopper, and to induce him to take items that he would never himself have purchased. Even the very volume of things does something to your

carnal desire and appetite—to have *one* of those. God has given us the blessed hope to sustain us when the pressures of merchandise come upon us. It is a hope of a particular kind that sustained and animated the saints of old as well as the early church. Abraham had this hope, though he was four thousand years away from the event, and it sustained him.

The principalities and powers of the air cannot abide anyone anticipating another kingdom other than their own. If we become eschatologically-minded and apocalyptically-minded, and anticipate an end, a new future, and an eternal reign different from this world, we become a people marked by the powers of darkness. We will find ourselves more than likely stripped of our goods, or at least experiencing some form of opposition. Only such a people can have true joy. If we are stripped, we can praise God, for it could not have happened without the Lord's permission, and in heaven there is a yet greater and enduring substance and reward.

> Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

It begins with the word *now*. Biblical hope—not human optimism—has to do with an expectancy for the future, and something which is beyond that which is now and presently seen. If it does not have a consequence that is immediate and present, it is not hope. That is the uniqueness of the faith, namely, that the things that are distant and future have an immediate and practical consequence *now*. There is an 'abounding' that is connected with hope that is not obtainable *except* by it. The very nature of the faith is to abound. Anything less than abounding is abnormal and substandard, and we need to be dissatisfied with anything less. Joy comes from heaven. It is *with* God, and cannot be obtained in the world, and the only way to have it is to abound in hope, that we might enjoy both peace and joy. In other words, we can only come to authentic joy by abounding in hope—and on no other basis.

Hope is the anticipation of something future. Hope is the desire for and belief that one day you are going to appropriate that which is yet invisible and distant. We cannot be holy or perfect without hope. Hope is the ingredient by which we believe we are going to be made perfect *in* Him. One of the things to look for in men who purport to be apostles is whether they have hope. True hope is active, palpitating, vital and alive. No matter what the circumstance, no matter what the present discouragement, their hope affects their now. Hope is the element by which one remains steadfast and immovable. The absence of hope guarantees the degradation of men. Men without hope in the world are condemned to the things that are vile. They see everything as pointless and meaningless, because they have no hope.

Scoffers in the Last Days

It is our lust, much more than we know, and not our intellect, that determines our theology.

> Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:3–4)

Though we subscribe to the correct doctrines inwardly, there is a way that we can 'mock' or 'scoff' without actually mouthing the question, "Where is the promise of His coming?" I would say that this is the condition of the majority of those who call themselves Christians. We give *credal* assent to the truth of the doctrine of the Lord's Second Coming, but we do not expect it, or look forward to it. It is not a palpable hope, especially if we would like to see this world continue. We have a nice place, security and comfort, and if there are any problems, we have a certain optimism that they will improve. We are not looking for another reality, and our views of the faith tend to be generated out of our lifestyle rather than the issues of truth. We have a tendency to embrace the things that reinforce or comfort us in the mode of life that *we* have chosen. The views of men are very much determined by how they choose to live.

The scoffers that Peter is talking about are not the scoffers in the world, but in the church. If you want to keep your theology pure and your doctrines right, then check your lifestyle. What is there in it that would compromise you? What is there that you want to see perpetuated that would be threatened by an end? If you want your lifestyle to continue, you are not going to embrace with enthusiasm an apocalyptic view that says there is an end. You will find a way either to nullify that expectancy, or you will give only a cerebral, outward and ceremonial acknowledgment of it, but in your heart you are subscribing to another faith.

The issue of voluntary poverty as a lifestyle may well be a necessity. Paul said that he was poor, and yet made many rich. Jesus had not a place to lay His head, and there is this conjunction between apostolic authority and poverty. There is a way, though, that Satan will take this and pervert it, for example, the whole tradition of monastic priests, who voluntarily take upon themselves the vow of poverty. This is a religious distortion of what I am talking about. There may have been some authentic men among them, but I am talking about something else. Even though we are able to live a standard of life that our income can afford, do our faith and expectancy of the things to come justify that lifestyle? Can we voluntarily reduce it, and simplify it, in keeping with the view to which we subscribe as being in harmony with that view? Can we hold that view, and still live a lifestyle that contradicts it without it affecting the truth of that view?

A lifestyle of excess and self-indulgence is incompatible with the apocalyptic view. Discipline is not forced upon us, but something we voluntarily take upon ourselves. Why should we give ourselves to the values established by the gods of this world, seeing that

they are soon to be unseated and defeated in the Lord's own coming? This view calls us to a kind of seriousness about how we presently live. It is a call to blamelessness, all the more in a world that is fast becoming so sinful and corrupted that to be blameless will mark you before men. It makes you a candidate for their reprisal because you are not 'one of the boys,' and your very sinlessness invokes their anger and retaliation against you.

Daniel refused to eat at the king's table. That table would have been a sumptuous, elaborate and lavish extravagance, as well as a sensual delight. If he had eaten at that table, as the false prophets ate from the table of Jezebel, would he have been able to be the instrument of God in that generation and to receive a revelation of the mysteries of God? The book of Daniel begins, significantly, with his refusal to eat from that table. It is more than the issue of eating, though that is not exempt, but the whole issue of lifestyle, if we are going to take a posture that is in opposition to a world that is under judgment. While everyone else is striving to obtain the things that boost their lifestyle, can we impose upon ourselves a voluntary discipline, and a simplifying of our lifestyle in resisting what is offered to us, even as legitimate?

Are we saying in our hearts, "This is not really important; this is just interesting and academic"? In other words, our hearts are scoffing at the content. There are audible scoffers and inward scoffers, and we might be surprised to be found among them, and even more surprised to find that the reason we are inwardly scoffing and inwardly rejecting is a consequence of a lifestyle that we have chosen and do not want to relinquish.

In looking for the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of the great God, there was an actual blessedness and a dimension of things that came into the daily life of the church that enabled it to look past its suffering and rejection. There was an expectation of something that was to come, and was soon. It was imminent, and soon to take place. It was at the door, and the Lord would come, vindicate, and also judge. If we were to be ruthlessly honest today, we simply do not have the blessed hope, and we have transmuted the blessed hope into a rapture-escape. That is not the biblical hope.

What makes scoffers scoff? An attitude of contempt and disdain, mocking and cynicism is due to walking after our own lusts. Scoffing is a consequence of their lusts, not their intellect, or their objective examination of Scripture. That which constitutes hope for one becomes derision and contempt for another based on how they *walk* in this life. If we want to have an apostolic view of the Scriptures, and a right expectation of the things that are future, we need to deny worldly lusts. The only power that can successfully meet and break the power of lust is the power of future hope, and an eternal expectation that is more than a doctrinal condescension. We are exhorted to hold fast the confession of our faith, of the things that will come *after*.

Apocalyptic Scenario

Apocalypse means the breaking in of God into time and history in judgment. It brings history to an end and ushers in the everlasting age. The world is hopelessly evil, and will become degenerately worse until there is no hope for its redemptive recovery. Then will the judgment come as the final, consummating event, the coming of God in His glory. It will be a sudden appearing, a divine penetration of heaven into earth.

Why is the Lord's coming not a lively expectation now? Why did that which the early church hoped for not materialize? Why is it that two thousand years later the hope of His coming has not yet materialized? Was the early church believing a fiction, an exaggerated view, that came into the faith as a kind of a hangover from Jewish apocalyptic expectancy about their own restoration and kingdom? An apocalyptic scenario is distasteful. Who wants to contemplate an end and destruction where the earth melts with a fervent heat, and the stars fall out of their place? A cataclysmic shaking of creation itself is not something that the flesh wants to consider, but it is a necessary ingredient in the whole apocalyptic picture.

There is a final devastation and shaking, and the only thing that will make one capable of bearing such a view is the joy that follows, because out of it comes a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. A new heaven and a new earth are only made necessary because the old earth and the old heavens, that is to say, the heavenlies, are caught up in the final devastation of God's judgment by which even the heavens are purified. It is not so much that things are going to be obliterated and replaced, but rather that one category is going to come and supersede and transfigure the other, and will therefore change both.

It is not the least of the reasons why those in the early church, who had land and houses, sold them and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. They distributed to those who were in need. What is the point in hanging on to your property? What are you waiting for? What do you expect if the end is near and at hand? Having this mindset gives you a certain release, and enables you to come into a largesse and magnanimity as against a clutching of something that one is reserving for the future. But if the future is now, and the age is at an end, and the Lord is coming, then what are you holding? It is better to give up those things, and employ them for the purposes of the church in its final activity than to embarrassingly be sitting on it when the Lord comes, and it has no value at all. Those early believers were not deceived to expect something that has not yet taken place, though it is two thousand years later. Why would God allow them to have a mentality like that, since what they expected did not materialize? Was God allowing His people to expect something that *could not* come that quickly? Is God Himself an agent of deception? Definitely not, but in that dynamic or expectation, a certain living takes place, a certain faith and laying up of treasure in heaven takes place. Apocalyptic expectancy has always been God's normative intention for the church in *every* generation.

The world is becoming an uninhabitable place, and if it were not for the hope of the faith, we ourselves also would despair. We need, therefore, to bring into our consciousness the

thing that was central to the church's life from the beginning, and needs again to be resurrected. The Day of the Lord's appearing is the Day of the establishing of His Kingdom. Righteousness shall go forth, and the law of the Lord out of Jerusalem. He shall rule all nations, and therefore it is the end of all filth, muck and corruption, and every kind of perverse thing that is celebrated today as good. We ought to *long* for the Day of His appearing. We who seek Him *with* that longing, hasten the Day of His appearing. I do not believe that it is a fixed chronological event, but that it has everything to do with the church, its character, its expectancy and its living anticipation. Peter wrote,

> Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! (2 Peter 3:11–12)

Only the prospect of a glorious reward accentuates that desire to long for, and hasten, the Lord's coming. The hope is blessed, because it gives the enablement to bear what one must. It is a confident expectation with the prospect of a glorious reward. You cannot explain Christian martyrdom outside of this hope of eternal reward. The fact that believers of the past went to their death joyously was one of the most profound testimonies of the truth of the faith to their own persecutors. Many, who brought them to the stake, were saved in the very process. They saw people who were not at all alarmed by the prospect of death, and who bore it with great patience, and even with joy, because they saw the reward, by the Spirit, that was being prepared for them.

The biblical and ancient hope of Israel, which has been lost, both to the church and the Jew, is the crucial aspect of a God who raises the dead, and that He will raise the dead again in His coming. The church at large *subscribes* to that doctrine, yet it lacks, in my opinion, the concomitant living hope. When they say, "Jesus is coming soon," they really mean that their *escape* is coming soon. There is not that purifying of ourselves, because we do not have the incentive to get our act together. If we could but see the church as God sees it, we would find that it is living beneath the apostolic standard. The dynamic and quality of our witness and life, and the willingness to break the power of our selfishness, are only possible when we truly believe that the Lord is at the door; and that we truly believe the world is coming to its historic end; and that God is going to break into time to conclude history, and to begin the reign of the Lamb. If that for us is not real and urgent, we will covet what we have, and hang on to our retirement plans. If we do not live as if we believe the Lord is coming, our witness to the Jew and the Gentile is grotesquely distorted. We have missed the central, foundational prop that was part of the early apostolic church's whole perception of life. We have reduced the once vital faith to just a compendium of 'dry as dust' doctrines to which we subscribe. It has not the power of conviction even to persuade us, let alone another, and our lifestyle betrays it.

God would have the church of every generation to live in an expectancy of the end, as being normative to true church living. We are in an unbroken continuum with the issues of the faith as it was struck in the beginning, and is still, and is now coming to a conclusion. Nothing has changed, and that is what we need to see.

Chapter 3 - Apostolic Realities: The Principalities and Powers of the Air

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The theme of the principalities and the powers of the air is foundational to all true seeing. The remarkable thing, though, is that it has to do with something totally invisible. There is a whole realm of invisible, angelic 'spirit-entities,' who have a profound influence over the conduct and course of individuals and nations. This topic is both difficult, and complex in every way. It is difficult because it is unfamiliar to us, and complex because it is strenuously opposed by the same powers of darkness.

It is extraordinary how naive, ignorant, and indifferent the church is toward the powers of darkness, *despite* the fact that this theme is absolutely foundational to the whole calling of the church! It is a perspective that pertains to the *whole* of reality, and of what God is about. The church has characteristically majored in the minors, and has ignored this major theme. All of our activity, therefore, is condemned to a certain kind of futility and fruitlessness. We dissipate our energy away, and walk on a horizontal level, and in an earthly way. Paul reminds us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood:

> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

This struggle, or wrestling, is something to be entered into by the corporate activity of believers together in Christ. It is *our* struggle. So who are these principalities and powers and the world forces of this darkness in the heavenly places? There is a whole realm of mystery here. The heavenlies that are referred to are not the ones that describe God's dwelling place. There is a certain order of beings in the very atmosphere, who brood over the earth, namely, the rulers or powers of the air. They are the rulers of this present world darkness. They preside in a kind of layer over the earth, and yet influence the conduct of men, and the things that take place in the earth.

In this verse there are five references to the word 'against.' We need to know that there is a war on, and that it has been on for thousands of years. It is a cosmic conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of God. If we think that the subject of demons is only the issue of personal deliverance, we have completely missed the *greater* importance. These principalities and powers would like for us to be totally caught up at the level of individual demon deliverance—as if *that* represents the whole issue. I am not invalidating deliverance for individuals, but it has fixed the understanding of the church at *that* level, and robbed it of the greater and truer understanding of the conflict, namely, the contention for the actual dominion or possession of creation and the nations. It may well be that the stratagem of these powers is to get us to be occupied at the level of personal deliverance rather than to be occupied with combat in the cosmic sense. There is a final defeat that needs to be inflicted upon them, which can only come by virtue of the church being the church in the apostolic sense.

If we want to understand the faith, and the church, we must understand it in the context of the conflict with the principalities and powers, or we simply do not understand it at all. If the church has not recognized the presence over their community of this invisible realm of spirit reality, and has not addressed that realm, and broken its influence over the community where they seek to labor, then they labor in vain. There is an episode in Daniel's life in which he prayed, yet it took three weeks for him to receive an answer. When the angel of the Lord came to Daniel, he told him that from the moment he, Daniel, opened his mouth, he was heard, but that the prince of Persia had contended and delayed his coming. So we are not talking about something imaginary; it is very real, and though it is an invisible realm, it has very practical consequences in the earth and with men.

As mentioned, this requires the church to be the church. If the church is only an institution, where people come to attend services, and sit in a kind of audience of isolated individuals, then it is not equipped for this struggle. This struggle requires the church to be the church in the sense that God intended it—not what *we* have made it. Unless the church is a "we," then it cannot engage in this struggle, and that is why the principalities and powers will do anything to divide the church, and divide individuals. They want to keep the church from becoming the corporate expression of the Life of God that can wrestle. We ourselves need to understand that, and give ourselves to seeing that the church comes to this kind of reality. It is contrary to our own flesh, because it requires time, it will mean the loss of privacy, and the opening of ourselves to things that might be embarrassing. We *prefer* the church in its present configuration. We like to be anonymous and see someone else 'do it,' and yet say our "Amen" and "Hallelujah." We do not want to be required of. But if we are going to be the church that brings glory to His name, and defeats the principalities and powers, then we ourselves must struggle against our own flesh, and our own unwillingness.

This is an apostolic view of the church as God intended it from the beginning. *Apostolic* is a certain view of reality, a certain mindset, a perception of things, particularly of the things that are not seen. It is a view of the church set in a cosmic context that sees a struggle that has gone on since the beginning of time. There was a rebellion in heaven, and one third of the angelic host followed their prince and rebelled against God. That rebellion continues until this day. All things were created by God, even these principalities and powers. They are an angelic creation, a 'spirit order' that was given initially by God for His own purposes. They have rebelled, however, against their Creator, and have therefore become a fallen angelic order.

The Fall

We have not sufficiently understood the meaning of the Fall. It was not only Adam and Eve, but very creation itself that was affected by the Fall. The Fall was the most significant tragedy, the greatest collapse, and the greatest catastrophe in the history of creation. The Fall brought the entire creation into corruption, including the angelic realm. These fallen angels, under the leadership of Satan, still maintain their governmental

places. They were designed and created in the realm over the earth to aid and abet the redemptive work of God in the earth, by bringing a certain kind of order through their influence. It was to be a benign influence in accordance with the purposes of God, that men would have an atmosphere hospitable to finding God, to knowing Him, and to coming into His salvation. Though they were intended as a benign influence in the aiding of God in His purposes, they have now, in their rebellion against the purposes of their Creator, taken unto themselves their own purposes. Their ruler Satan seeks to be deified, and to turn the loyalties and attention of men unto himself, and to establish his own values contrary to God's, and thus turn men away from God. They have taken their governmental place, and used it for themselves to become the gods of this world.

We can see it, for example, in race and nation. God created races and nations, but not to become idolatries as things in themselves. This was clearly revealed in the Nazi time, when the nation Germany became elevated above God. There were principalities and powers playing upon nationality to bring the worship and attention of men to themselves. The very German theologians, who would not consider this subject, had to experience these powers in the paganism, the violence, and the death that characterized Nazi Germany. When those powers broke through, they turned the loyalties of men to themselves, in the name of race and nation. They established a new order that was a perverse, antichrist distortion.

Someone has wisely said that Germany lost World War II, but the same powers of darkness that precipitated it remain unchallenged to this day. The Nazi regime was defeated militarily, but the spirit powers, who expressed themselves through that nation to the virtual destruction of the civilized world, prevail still. The same spirits hover over that nation—and all nations—waiting for the conditions again by which they can come and manifest themselves, even to the turning of a nation to the most satanic purposes. We would be foolish and naive to continue in a willful ignorance of these realities.

We have no idea of the influence of the principalities and powers. Nazism took hold, not in some primitive nation, but in the most eminent and prominent civilization of *all* nations. What is more, it took as little as ten years. They went 'too far' and revealed themselves, not being satisfied merely to exert their influence invisibly, but took captive the whole organ of state. If we fail to understand what the Nazi phenomenon means, we will continue in an ignorance that for us will be tragic. What took place in Nazi Germany was a preview of Last Days' antichrist reality. The things that have been veiled and concealed are being unveiled and revealed in open antagonism against God. We are coming to the final showdown in which the principalities and powers will be seeking complete domination over this cosmos at the end of the age.

God has created this governmental realm to sustain creation, but the powers of the air function today in opposition to what was divinely and originally assigned them. They behave as though *they* were the ultimate ground and reason for being. They gave to themselves a power beyond God's intention, namely, to be seen as something ultimate. And they have taken the things that God intended as ultimate and made them to be irrelevant, like for example, eternity. They have turned the whole value system the wrong

way up. When the apostles came into the world, they turned the world upside-down. They brought back the original and Divine perspective for creation, which had been lost, because the whole of creation and nations had come under this demonic order. They were reversing the true values for which God gave the creation.

You say, "Just how influential are these spirit powers?" They were sufficiently influential to crucify Christ:

> Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:6–8)

Paul is not speaking here of Pontius Pilate, or even the Sanhedrin, but the 'rulers of this age.' They are the principalities and powers of the air, who are invisible and super-terrestrial (beyond the earth), and who operate through worldly and earthly authorities—though they be ignorant of their influence. They expressed their rule *through* Pontius Pilate, and *through* the Sanhedrin. In other words, they expressed themselves through the very best of religious and civil government. Roman law and authority was considered to be the epitome of civilized law. Much of present day legal jurisprudence is derived from Roman law. The Roman law and Jewish religion, that is to say, the 'best' of both worlds, conspired together to crucify the Lord of glory. But they themselves were inspired by the rulers of this age. If the powers had understood the wisdom of God, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. They acted out of their own wisdom, and it is a wisdom that employs force, intimidation and threat of death.

The powers are characteristically cynical and unbelieving, profoundly egotistical and vain. Though God says they will meet defeat, they do not believe it about themselves. They act with a presumption and arrogance contrary to what God says concerning their fate and destiny.

> But you (Satan) said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." (Isaiah 14:13–14)

And God answers,

> Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit. (Isaiah 14:15)

That presumption and *that* arrogance are at the heart of the character of the powers of darkness. The whole fallen angelic realm has the character of Satan himself, and will suffer the eternal fate with Satan in the Lake of Fire. They know, but they do not know,

so to speak, because had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But it was a hidden wisdom in the intention of God. In being slain from the foundations of the world, the Lord already, in His marvelous wisdom, foresaw and ordained that His Son would come and die, but it was a hidden wisdom that the powers could not see, though they are cunning. We are told to be aware of the wiles of the devil. He is cunning, crafty ,and very clever. He was once the anointed cherub and angel of light, having a remarkable brilliance, but it will yet be his undoing, because his character contradicts his gift. That is also the undoing of any of us when our character is not in keeping with our gifting or our calling.

The Cosmic Setting

Even the word 'cosmic' is alien to the consciousness of the church. We do not think in cosmic terms, but first in personal terms, then local, then national, and maybe with some regard to the world. Cosmic, however, is beyond all of these categories, yet includes them all. The apostolic view is a cosmic view, and yet I do not even know how to define the word cosmic. It is more than just interplanetary. It is the total setting of the redemptive work of God in creation as described in Ephesians 3:8–12:

> To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.

This is so important in the sight of God that it was not, in His opinion, too extravagant to create *all* things that this could be performed. This *one* thing will revolutionize our entire perspective about God, for He has purposes unto Himself, that have absolutely nothing to do with the benefits *we* receive as being the church, or that will even be experienced in the world. There is nothing here about what will happen to benefit the world. It is solely and exclusively something that satisfies the heart of God. Moreover, it is so important that He created all things in order that *now* this thing might be performed through the church.

In other words, the whole of creation in God's sight was to make possible the church. This is turning everything upside-down. The world thinks that it was created for itself. It thinks that it can have its great cities, its commerce, its trade, its culture, and all of the things that men celebrate. The world sees the church as a 'Sunday thing' that society is willing to allow to exist, as long as it does not bother mankind and the things that are important to themselves. This is contrary to what God says. The church itself does not see this, but rather sees herself as established to provide men with certain blessings by

meeting their needs. That is a grotesque distortion, and is not the purpose for which God has established the church. Church is not something that panders to men; it is not something institutional that has been established to requite the interests of men by establishing programs and services. The church at large, even in its best forms, has regrettably come to that pitiful condition, exactly for the absence of the knowledge of the eternal purpose of God for the church. In fact, until we identify with the eternal purpose of God, and look to the fulfilling of it, we never will meet the needs of men. Once we see this, we begin to realize that our jobs and careers are all secondary, the merest provisions from God, in order to keep body and soul together.

Why is the church so itchy and always wanting to find something to do? Why must it always have a program, or something to justify its existence? Perhaps the answer lies in that it does not see its existence in any other terms but in meeting the needs that are immediate and about them. It has not seen what would have given it its security and foundation in God, namely, the taking up of the eternal purpose. It would have freed it from the necessity and the itch to *do* and *perform*.

I cannot say enough to register this upon our spirits. If this does not find a place in our hearts and understanding, we are crippled in our service *for* God, as well as our knowledge *of* God. We need to understand the cosmic context of the entire faith itself, and that there is a drama of a moral and cosmic kind that has had its inception from the beginning, and is moving toward its conclusion. And the final drama is to be fulfilled by the church itself.

Since the church does not float in the air, but has its being on the earth, God created the earth in order that, through the church, a certain demonstration could be made. In other words, our whole view of creation has got to be related to our whole view of redemption. God did not create all things in order that we could enjoy the benefits of the earth, although it has been given to be enjoyed. His purpose is that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be demonstrated to the principalities and the powers of the air. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the *eternal* purpose of God for creation, and for the church. The church that chooses to be ignorant of the eternal purpose of God, and does not give itself to that purpose as the first and foremost purpose for its being, is, by that selfsame thing, not the church. The church that is indifferent to the eternal purpose of God, let it be however impressive in every other way, is not the church in any apostolic and prophetic sense, which is to say, in any authentic sense. In order to be the church that is the church in truth, we must embrace the eternal purpose of God, even though we do not see any practical consequence for doing so. In fact, we will find that God’s purpose does not in any way serve *our* purposes. It does not aid mankind, or seem to alleviate any present ill in the world. It is altogether a mystery of a *demonstration* to be made to the principalities and powers of the air. The church that is willing to make *this* demonstration is thereby making known the manifold wisdom of God. This *is* in itself the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of this world is predicated upon self-interest and practicality, that says, "What is the benefit for me if I do this? What is in it for *me*?" But the wisdom of God is

altogether sacrificial. It does not rest on the benefit that one receives, but on the benefit that *God* receives. There is no benefit for us, but rather the likelihood of embracing redemptive suffering in order that *He* receives His fulfillment. That is so contrary in every point and particular to the ruling mentality of this world. The wisdom of this world says, "Take care of number one; see to your own self-interest; be concerned for your own security; you have only got this one life."

There is such a power of self-interest, even in spiritual things, that needs to be broken. The principal thing that God gives to break the orbit of self-centeredness is the subject of the eternal purposes of God. We are out of whack and warped until eternity has come into our hearts and into our consideration *for His sake*. We will be doomed to a spiritual egotism and a viewing of things in a way that only affects *us*. That power can only be broken by embracing a purpose greater than us, and other than us—namely, the eternal purpose of God. And what do the powers of darkness say? "That is nonsense; you cannot do that; that is irrational and contradictory; nature itself tells you that self-interest and survival are the very principles of life; it is a self-evident truth; you got it in the Declaration of Independence with its pursuit of happiness as being a self-evident truth, and an inalienable right; your happiness, *now*, in this life; that is what it is about." *That* is the wisdom of this world, but God is waiting for another wisdom to be demonstrated, and everything in the flesh, the world and the devil conspires against it.

There is an eternal purpose that has to do with God's own satisfaction. God says that a people who will willingly embrace a purpose unto themselves that has not to do with their own benefit, *and make it their first purpose for being*, is the wisdom of God. For that was the wisdom demonstrated at the Cross! It was the giving up for another of anything that pertains to one's own life and satisfaction. In other words, the ability to lay down one's life, and not to consider that one's life is dear to oneself, *is* the wisdom of God. It is a wisdom predicated on weakness and foolishness. One wisdom lives for itself, its own preservation, and its own advantages, while God's wisdom lives for another. It is selfless, and also the wisdom of the Son of God, who never initiated anything in Himself and for Himself, but lived entirely for the gratification of His Father.

The principalities and powers make men respond to their own self-interest. This can be just as prevalent in the ministerial world, where ministers attend Bible School so that they can be credentialized, thereby establishing their ministry. And then they can go from youth leader to associate pastor to one day becoming the senior pastor, and so on. It has the underlying and often unconscious presupposition, "What is in it for me?" As long as we ourselves are affected and ruled by self-interest, we have nothing to say to the principalities and powers of the air. The question, then, is how can we be free from this enormous power of self-interest, which seems to be built right into human nature itself? God broke that power at the Cross.

"Come down and we will believe you," the crowd shouted at Jesus, but He would not. If He had come down, thereby seeking His self-interest and preservation of His life, He would have contradicted the very wisdom of God Himself. Staying on the Cross unto death is an exhibition of another kind of wisdom. Your reason for living is not for

yourself, but for another, namely, *God and His glory*. It takes a power to be released from self-interest, and to live for the glory of God, and that power is in the Cross itself.

The Clash of Two Wisdoms

We need to understand that there are two wisdoms in collision. Even the word ‘wisdom’ is slightly confusing here, because we think of wisdom in terms of cleverness, and the application of knowledge. A better definition for wisdom would be, "the moral values of God." It is what God is in Himself, and therefore it is what the church must demonstrate in *itself* exactly who and what God is in Himself. This is what Jesus did in His earthly walk. Everything He did was for the purpose of the Father, without regard to Himself, even though it resulted in His own suffering and death. God is waiting for the corporate church to make exactly the same demonstration in order that the age might conclude. When we begin to take God and His Word seriously, and realize that this must be fulfilled through the church, then we should also realize that God is calling us to more than the casual conglomeration of saints meeting on Sunday. This requires an earnest, daily relationship, and a growing up together.

The moment we, as the church, say "yes" to this, we become marked in the sight of the principalities and powers, and they will test us in it. We will open ourselves to a new kind of opposition, if not persecution. And it may well be that the believers who intuit this, keep themselves safely from the issue, not wanting to stir up the powers of darkness against them. God allows that opposition, however, because it deepens the quality and character of the church that overcomes it. This is the cosmic context of the church in the world.

We can ‘speak’ about fighting spiritual battles or ‘doing’ spiritual warfare, but when we do not understand the framework, then even that can be false. Even when we think we are defeating them, they are laughing at us. The demonic statement in Acts, *"Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are you?"* is a haunting indictment that reverberates to this very day. Someone has said—Do not be concerned about how men view you. You will be far better off to know how the powers of darkness view you. If you are seen by them as one to be feared, you are in a much better place than if men were paying you honor. The powers fear anyone who takes the Word of God, the Lordship of God, and His purposes seriously.

We will know how successful we are as the church to the degree that the powers of the air recognize our authenticity. It is preposterous to believe that ‘shouting down’ and ‘taking cities for Christ’s sake’ are going to effect anything, as if the issue is how loud we can shout or the use of the correct terminology. The issue is the integrity, the quality, and the authenticity of the life together. The powers of the air will be only too glad to allow you to get clever verbally and conceptually. They are only frightened when it becomes real. When they see the authenticity of the crucified life and character, which is to say,

the very resurrection Life of God Himself in His own nature, then they flee in terror. They know whom to regard.

If the church itself lives by the wisdom of the world, then it has no effectual opposition to those powers. They are required to recognize apostolic authenticity only, that is to say, they need to see the reality of heaven and the wisdom of God as being the effectual foundation of God's people. This is a fundamental shift of a whole view of life itself, of reality, and of value. It is no small thing to come into this. We need, therefore, to burrow deeply into this mystery,

> … in order that the manifold wisdom of God might *now* (my emphasis) be made known through the church ….(Ephesians 3:10a)

Paul spoke that two thousand years ago, but that *now* is still reverberating. That same demonstration to the principalities and powers in heavenly places needs yet to be made. It seems to be altogether unrelated to practical things in the world, and that is what the devil would have you to believe, namely, that the things that are eternal are irrelevant now. Exactly the opposite is true, because to be eternal-minded is to be relevant in time. God does not put them in separate categories. That is the world's game: *secular* and *spiritual*; or *time* and *eternity*. God wants this dimension to be brought into our present consideration. To embrace the eternal purposes of God in time will change everything *now,* and make us more significant and relevant *now*.

The Cosmic Struggle

This cosmic struggle involves mastery for the control and dominion of the whole cosmos. It is a moral struggle by two kinds of moral orders: the righteousness, holiness and humility of God versus another kind of wisdom that is diabolically opposed to it in every point and particular. It is the wisdom of God verses the wisdom of Satan.

There is a competition or a striving, a conflict, between *who* is going to prevail in creation, and what wisdom, or value system, or way of perceiving reality itself is going to prevail. We know that the whole world lies in the power of the wicked one, who is also the father of lies. We need also to realize the degree to which these powers have been successful in deceiving mankind about truth, about reality, and about the purposes of life itself. They are enslaving mankind over things that are immediate and visibly before them, but completely shutting out any view of the things that pertain to eternity. The whole world is steeped in a fundamental lie, and even the church itself is unaware of this, and subscribes to the lies, and the values of a world system, which, in the Last Days, will become very prominent as an Antichrist system.

The powers of the air are enslaving and tyrannical, wanting to dominate God's creation and all of mankind. The first mandate to Adam was to take dominion *over* God's creation. God's rule and authority over what He created is very differently expressed than

Satan's rule. Satan's is domination, which we can even exercise as husbands over wives, or perform it as ministers in the church. The other is God's dominion, which has a very different character and rule. The former expresses the distinctive genius of the character of Satan, and the latter the character of God. Both are in collision for the triumphant possession, or rule, over this creation, and *that* is the cosmic struggle.

The World as System

Scofield, the British theologian, defines *world* as the *present world system*, a system that is antithetical to God in every point and particular. The word *system* itself suggests something that man, out of his own wisdom and mentality, has made. Even in the religious world, we are continually tempted to become a system, to systematize something, and to bring it under human arrangement.

The world's system is rooted in power, force, threat, intimidation, ambition and lust. That is what moves the world, and what motivates people to work. That is why they go to college, and anyone who has gone to college knows that it is a whole system by which your life is drained in order to obtain a credential that fits you for a professional employment of a higher compensation. It is a credentializing system, and the principalities and the powers are deeply involved in the entire system. Only someone who has been in it, and whose spiritual eye has been opened, can see it. The same thing is true in the world of culture, the world of war, the world of government, and the world of religion. Wherever there are systems, wherever men are seeking to promote their interests based on greed, power, ambition, seduction and force, it is precisely *there* that the powers of the air have their influence, and have taken those men captive. Institutions are not just objective organizations summoned by men to provide human need. They have a life of their own, a purpose of their own, and a reason for being that needs to be perpetuated. If you begin to challenge their assumptions, and the premises by which they have their being, you begin to touch the power that exists invisibly behind them.

Wherever you see an addiction, a craze, or something that sweeps nations, for example, certain lines of children's toys where the child *must* have it, then you know that there are powers operating. Rock and roll, punk rock culture, music and sport can be added to the list. What has happened with sports is unbelievable. It is no longer just a pleasant pastime, but a powerful, dominating influence for which men will kill their rivals and their opponents, if the game does not go their way or the referee makes a wrong call. Hockey is not hockey unless there is brutal violence on the ice rink.

That system can only be exposed by those who are living completely free of it, who are not living under its influence or threatened by it. They do not need to have their security established, either physically or socially, by obtaining it in the system. To be out of the system is to be a pilgrim, a sojourner and a stranger in the earth. It is a very painful feeling, because we want the security of approval from those who have authority, prestige, influence and power.

The world as system will, in the last analysis, and in order to preserve its interests, resort to violence. On the other hand, the wisdom of God will, in the last analysis, give itself over to being the victim of violence. It will suffer violence against itself, like death at the Cross, rather than preserve itself by acting in violence or in force. We have got to see a whole world as a system enslaving mankind, sending its sons off to wars, killing its children in the womb because of a lust thing that is encouraged through films, etc. The whole system is predicated on pleasure, ambition, satisfaction, and your whole life is spent in keeping your head above water in the system. The system makes sure your time and attention are completely distracted from God, and that you are giving yourself to the gods of this world, *even as Christians*.

In fact, how would we describe present day Christianity? Is it willing to be radically other than this world? Or does it want to find a place of acceptance and respect *in* the world and in its system, and yet be Christian also in a Sunday manner of speaking? That is the kind of Christianity we believe will persecute the remnant people of God in the Last Days, because of the 'fanatical' absoluteness of their faith, which sees and is opposed to the world and its systems. These forces are working now. Everything is coming into place for this final and colossal struggle, and it is not so much the world we need to fear as those who *will kill us and claim they are doing God a service*. There is something about the religious system that is most threatened by people who take the eternal purpose of God seriously—it crucified Christ, and made martyrs of the apostles. In fact, there is no place where the principalities and powers have a more powerful influence than in religious institutions. Climbing up the ladder of religious success, becoming an elder, all the honors and esteem, give open door to the principalities and powers to come in and to find lodging. It is so ironic that in the very structures of Christian religion, the principalities and powers have such enormous place.

> From the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast established strength, because of Thine adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease. (Psalm 8:2)

How does God do this? The 'enemy' celebrates pomp, prestige, fame and the things men admire, and when *that* comes into our religion, we are finished. Certain men like to wear cellular telephones on their belt. This is not a small thing. We are in a cosmic conflict. It is a step in the wrong direction, because it gives an air of prestige, as right away one knows that he has the finances to afford that, and he must be important or else he would not need it. If I know anything about God, His most significant work will be performed through men whom no one knows. Paul said this about himself, "Unknown, but well known." Unknown to men, but well known to God. The powers of the air also know those who have authority, and who have kept themselves from the spirit of the world. They see that those who wear cellular phones in their belt are exhibiting prestige, or have ambition, and therefore those men are of no consequence whatsoever to those powers. They share the same wisdom as the powers. God has chosen the foolish and the weak thing, and we need to live without the need to possess and to have, to seek prestige and to be recognized. The guileless and the childlike manifest the wisdom that defeats the

powers. The Christianity that becomes prestigious, dignified, acceptable and respectable is apostasy.

The Theocratic Context

The underlying, great issue of all is the issue of government, and there is very little comprehension in the church that this is even an issue at all. God is going to establish His theocratic rule (theocracy is the government of God) over creation. If we do not understand that the basic striving and competition is for who will in fact rule over creation, then we do not understand the context in which the whole drama is being played out.

When we come to talk about Israel, we will see that Israel is not just a subject or an issue in itself, but what makes Israel profoundly important is that it is the key to the establishment of the theocratic rule of God. Ruling and reigning is the principal struggle over creation, and Israel is set right in the midst of it. Israel as a nation presently has no consciousness of these things, but the church must be conscious of it, or it will not understand why God has got to be so ruthless in His dealings with that nation. He needs to prepare it for its own place in the rule of God, because the theocratic rule must take place *with* that nation and *in* its own land:

> For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:3b)

This is not poetry, but literal, and the powers of darkness know it better than the church. We need to be clear as to what God's intention is, because it is over *that* that the issue of Israel is going to rage. The powers of darkness want to exterminate that nation whose survival and restoration to their God is the key to the ushering in of the theocratic rule of God. Indeed, the issue of the government of God is a foundational principle of the faith. The disciples said to Jesus,

> "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6b)

At least they asked the right question, but they saw it only in a narrow, nationalistic sense, not recognizing the universal significance of that Kingdom. The time for the restoration of that Kingdom was not for that time, but in the future. However, as we shall see, the church is God's instrument in bringing Israel *into* that restored place that releases the Lord and His coming as King, and the bringing forth of that government.

We need to begin to think in governmental terms. The word 'government' itself has been polluted and corrupted by men. Human government is shot through with selfish ambition, with conniving, with scheming, with self-aggrandizement, with padding one's pockets, with privilege and with opportunity. But for that reason we must not 'throw the baby out

with the bath water.' We need to restore the word to its pristine and original meaning. The government of God is more than bureaucracy; it has to do with order, but it has also to do with values, justice, righteousness, equity, peace, mercy, compassion, and love. The world governments know nothing of these things. They are predicated on power, advantage and ambition, but the government of God is life-giving. It is sanity and health for all mankind. We need to understand the church in the context of these things, or else we will think that the church is just a place where our needs are met, and services are conducted. That kind of mentality will not prepare us for anything. It does not move us toward anything, and therefore we do not even understand our own identity as the church in the nations.

> For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel shall be saved … (Romans 11:25–26a)

My interpretation of these verses is that when the full number needed to replace the fallen angelic order has been obtained from among all nations, then all Israel will be saved. They will then rule and reign in their place from the very same heavenly places, only this time not *contrary* to the purposes of God, but *for* the purposes of God. What a difference that will make. Right now, God is being opposed by the very angelic order that He Himself established, and part of the whole cosmic history of the purpose of the church is to find and prepare a people from among all nations to replace the fallen angels in the heavenly realm. That is why we will need glorified bodies, and why Jesus said to Nathaniel,

> "You are impressed because I saw you sitting under the fig tree! I will show you a greater thing, namely, angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (paraphrased)

In other words, messengers or glorified saints will be moving back and forth in concert with God and a restored Israel in the outworking of the millennial Kingdom and its theocratic rule, ministering the wisdom of God over the earth. If we can see *that*, would we not welcome the preparation now? Would we not have a totally different view of what our life means if we knew that it was a preparation for that? Would we not recognize that the foundational purpose for our being is the fitting for the eternal purpose of God?

The Final Defeat

Paul was extremely conscious of this whole invisible spirit-realm, and that we signify certain things in our conduct. For example, women keeping their head covered is a statement to those powers of a submission that is important. In fact, we need to be careful not to rail against that whole spirit dimension. The Scriptures read,

> But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude v 9)

I think one of the dangerous things taking place now in the church is the kind of religious egotism that says, "We can put the devil in his place" and, "All we need to do is shout them down." Be careful. Why are we cautioned not to rail against them? It is a very important principle. Though they are a fallen angelic order, they were in the beginning given governmental position to administrate the purposes of God.

We read in Colossians 2:15 that Christ has disarmed the powers of the air:

> When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Jesus unseated and made a public display of them, but the final defeat must come through the church. He disarmed them, but He did not put them out of commission. The powers of darkness still exist and still play a tremendous role in intimidating, threatening and manipulating individuals and nations through fear and insecurity. They say, "If you do not have your place in the system, then what is your security? And how are you going to live? And what if you do not have this insurance? And what if you do not have this or that provision?"

They are disarmed and defeated, which is to say, they have no effectual legal power to continue. They can only victimize the ignorant, the spiritually blind, and those who have not understood that these powers have been disarmed and broken at the Cross. Can you now understand why Paul wanted to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified? Every time the Cross is proclaimed in authenticity and power, their defeat is made more manifest. It is little wonder we hear so little preaching of the Cross. Every true obedience is a reiteration of the Cross. The power of the Cross is revealed wherever there is an obedience unto suffering, and wherever there is a trust in God, rather than a trust in yourself. Wherever the powers of the air see the Cross reiterated, in that place, and in that moment, they are defeated and set back. It is not only the Cross proclaimed, but the Cross demonstrated. Every time the Cross is demonstrated, namely, the suffering of it, the death of it—in that moment, the power of it is released, and the powers of the air are required to flee.

Jesus gave Himself without spot by the eternal Spirit of God. It was the kind of sacrifice that was only made possible, even for Him, by the operation of God’s own Spirit, who is the eternal Spirit, and who is the Spirit of sacrifice. Every time that sacrifice is made by that Spirit, it is another demonstration of what was expressed at the Cross, which the principalities and powers of the air cannot abide. It is the demonstration of God Himself. It is what God is in Himself. He is by very nature self-sacrifice, and when *He* is exhibited, the powers of the air are finished, and when He is exhibited through His own Body, the church, then *that* is the final defeat.

Every time we defer immediate gratification, it is an act on earth that verifies and substantiates that there is a God in Heaven. How else is our 'peculiar' behavior to be understood? Our essential life and conduct has its determinant by an invisible God. Just that alone is contrary to the wisdom of this world. The wellspring of what explains us, and how we act and do, is entirely to be understood on the basis of a God who is unseen, and our conduct is what demonstrates *Him*, what *He* is. Otherwise our conduct has no explanation at all, and especially so when our conduct is contrary to our own self-interest, which is the fundamental principle of the wisdom of this world.

"You shall be witnesses unto Me" is not handing out tracts. It is demonstrating *this*—that "I am God, though invisible, and the truth of Me is exhibited by your obedience in this earth, particularly when it flies in the face of your self-interest, and will more likely earn for you discomfort or suffering." That is a witness unto Him that the principalities and powers of the air cannot abide.

It is a response that is possible only in those who have determined not to hold their lives as dear to themselves. Who else would care that the eternal purposes of God are fulfilled, except those who love Him—more than their own lives? Are we more jealous that God should receive *His* satisfaction than we are for *our* safety, *our* security and *our* pleasure? Are we free from intimidation, even the necessity to impress the saints? We need to lose the necessity to perform, which is the heart of utility. Wherever there is intimidation, the powers of darkness are present, because it is their principal weapon. The way in which they still have influence is through intimidation, playing upon fear, insecurity, and the need for acceptance, for fame, for recognition, for prestige and for success—the very values that they themselves promote.

The Power of the Cross

There is a power in the Cross, and a triumph won there that needs to be made manifest in every place through the presence and the proclamation of a believing church, whose very presence is a statement to the principalities and powers that their final vanquishing and defeat is at hand. Where they see *this* faith, *this* understanding, *this* proclamation and the realization of *this* victory by those who themselves are no longer under fear, manipulation or threat, they are required to recoil, draw back and release their influence over men in that area. We labor in vain if we do not understand this! What is our evangelizing and our Christian programs, but sound and fury signifying nothing, if we have not first wrestled against the principalities and powers of the air, and broken their uninterrupted sway over the very areas where we seek to bring the light of God.

So long as we are a people who are fearful for our security, who tremble over the issue of our own finances, who model ourselves after the world, and use their techniques for obtaining funds, then we constitute no threat to these powers. Something needs to be proclaimed as well as demonstrated in the very life of the church. We need *ourselves* to live free from the powers, free from fear, from anxiety, from seduction and manipulation.

Wherever we calculate things to produce a certain effect and to obtain a certain response, we are guilty of manipulation. As long as we are moving in the very wisdom of the powers themselves, we constitute no witness against them. We need to display that we are not only free from fear for our own security, but joyfully free!

If the chief weapon of the powers of darkness is to intimidate men through fear of death, and the necessity to survive, they are defeated by a church that is not afraid of death, who can say with Paul, *"O Death, where is your victory, where is your sting?"*

When Pontius Pilate said to Jesus, *"Do you not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify you?"*—he thought Jesus would crumble and plead for His life. Yet Jesus did not even blink an eyelash and replied, *"You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given to you from above."* He had an absolute confidence that nothing could terminate His life before the purposes of the Father were fulfilled, and we need to have exactly the same confidence. When the doctors of the law were interrogating Stephen, he did not know that that was going to be his last confrontation. It would eventuate in his death, but when it came, even with its suddenness, there was no pleading. His face shone and radiated like an angel. It seemed such a tragic waste that his life should be cut short, and though the Lord took him abruptly, there was never any sense of misgiving that there was some error being made. He saw the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father to receive him, because his earthly purposes were finished. We need a whole alteration in our thinking, and to struggle to lengthen or perpetuate our days, but to serve the purposes for which our days are given. When they are concluded, we can look with rejoicing to the fact that we are released from our bodies, that we might be present with the Lord. It is God who is the Sovereign Determiner of those things.

There are some very real issues before us with which we can no longer afford to play. The manifold wisdom of God that is waiting to be demonstrated beyond the earth, and into the very cosmos itself, is reserved for one instrument in God's eternal purpose—the church. You can understand that the church has to be more than an institution providing religious services. It is a people who live without fear, a people who are already in the realm of the eternal, who are joyfully freed from the power of mammon and who are walking in the light, righteousness and truth. It is liberating to be able to walk through supermarkets and malls without being seduced. You can look at the merchandise, you can touch it, but you can also walk through it, because it does not have a power to captivate your soul. It does not fasten on your time, your energy, and your thoughts, because you have a more powerful value, which is eternal and that touches the glory of God, and frees you, therefore, from the power of this world.

The Meaning of the Cross

We need to have a view of the atonement in the light of a deeper understanding of the Cross, and what was performed there. It is more than the issue of individual or personal

sin and forgiveness. The prevailing view of the atonement held today is essentially that the whole work of the Cross was a substitution, or a fulfilling of a satisfaction of God for sin by the sacrifice of Jesus. The atonement is understood only on a personal level to remove the guilt of sin, and that is essentially the whole of it. It has nothing to say about the power of sin, but only of sin as personal, individual failing, and that the atonement is Christ satisfying some requirement of the Father, thereby expiating the *guilt* of sin.

The work of the atonement, however, was much more than just the expiation for the guilt of individual sin. The principal work of God at the Cross was destroying the works of the Devil, and defeating the *power* of sin and death. It was a victory over sin itself *as power*, and over the principalities and powers of the air. That victory is permanent, enduring and eternal, and the church needs to live in the consciousness of that triumph. It was the triumph *over* Satan, evil and death, much more than the issue of personal sin. Traditional Christianity has an inadequate view of sin, and sees it from a moralistic or even humanistic view as a kind of failing, rather than a power that resides in the human nature, as well as in the principalities and the powers of the air.

If this is a time of restoration, then one of the things which needs to be restored is the significance of the Cross, and what was actually performed there. It makes a profound difference how we view what took place there. If we see sin as only an individual, moralistic failure, a mistake that can be paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus to remove the guilt of it, and then tomorrow you perform it again, then we have totally misunderstood the atonement.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. I do not know to what degree we realize that our whole Christianity is very individualistic, very personal: "*My* salvation, *my* going to heaven," rather than the great issues of defeating the powers of the air that are competing in a cosmic rivalry with God over His own creation. And that it requires the corporate church in its full authority as an instrument to complete that victory at the end. To think of Jesus' work as a triumph brings a very different view with regard to our place in the purposes of God. But if we are thinking only personally and individually, then heaven for us is a place where you go and enjoy an eternal vacation. If we are thinking of the triumph of God, then the heavenlies are a place that we will come to occupy in a governmental capacity to rule and reign with Him in the establishment of His Theocratic Kingdom.

The view that sin is only a personal failing is trivializing sin. It is not a recognition of the radical power of evil that required the very sacrifice of God in His Son to defeat it at the Cross. I wish I could go on to explain what an inadequate view of sin means in terms of opening the door for the ravages of evil. For example, the Jewish rejection of the Cross, and its meaning, and the disposition to push it away from our consciousness, and to look upon the crucifixion of Jesus as only a kind of momentary, historical accident of no great significance, means that Judaism and world Jewry have lost the one and great opportunity given by God to recognize the nature of evil. In other words, the revelation of evil comes by seeing what it cost God to meet it and defeat it. The enormity and magnitude of what

was wrought at the Cross in God being crucified is the most powerful provision given of God to glimpse the magnitude of the evil of sin itself as *power*.

The humanistic interpretation of the atonement has its ground in the failure to see the radical hostility of God to evil, and His judgment upon sin. It does not recognize sin for the evil that it is, but concerns itself essentially with guilt, and that guilt can be relieved by the propitiation that Jesus provided in satisfying the need of the Father for a just retribution. It makes God the Father look like a heavy-handed Old Testament deity who demands a certain kind of justice to make the thing right, and Jesus was that necessary 'sacrifice.' This interpretation does not see that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, but rather that Jesus the man, the perfect man, and the ideal man, was the satisfaction that requited God the Father's need for justice. It appeased Him as the God of vengeance and judgment. Well, if that is your view of God, then there is going to be every temptation to be drawn to something that is much more sentimental and consoling.

Jesus allowed Himself to suffer the full brunt of the powers of evil and death, and was raised from it by the power of the Father. There was a triumph over death, and over evil, by the wisdom of God in the humility, meekness, long-suffering and patience of the Lord. That is the true meaning of the Cross. It is much more than a God of vengeance being satisfied that an atonement was made, which is a very limited and inadequate view, and will negatively affect our entire view of God Himself. There are purposes in the atonement that go far beyond the benefit that comes to us as individuals. It is not that we are absolved of individual responsibility for sin, but that we need to see that our sins are related to the *power of sin*. It was the defeat of the power of sin itself at the Cross, and therefore we no longer need to live in it, or yield our members to it. It is not just the release from guilt, but a new life being imparted, and a new principle of life that comes with the resurrection from that death.

The Provision of God in Community

We cannot come to freedom from that influence by ourselves. There are so many hooks in us. We need the prayer, the support, and the encouragement of those we are joined with. We need the encouragement of people with a like mind and heart to be a people who demonstrate the wisdom of God. I cannot see that we can be this people except 'in community.' The separation from the world is so painful, and those powers are so pervasive and powerful. Only through the aid, the encouragement, the prayer, the wisdom, the counsel of others, and the atmosphere that we generate together as the community of God's people, can we live like that and maintain that freedom without again being sucked back into the power of the world.

Community living or an intensity of fellowship is God's provision to resist and overcome the powers of the air. Sons and daughters of God are those who will overcome the world, the flesh and the Devil, and the enormous power that is increasing through the influence of these things. We are urged to exhort one another *daily* while it is yet today. Tomorrow

is too late, let alone next Sunday. If we are not in daily attendance to one another in an atmosphere of encouragement and correction, reproof, prayer, counsel, then we will find ourselves being drawn away. The leaven of sin finds its way in, and we can be drawn back into the world.

In the intensity of life together, and in that interrelationship, we can more easily recognize the issues of whether Mickey Mouse or Power Rangers are dangerous things that carry a certain spirit from which we need to separate ourselves. It is more than just merchandise that is being presented as harmless, and even attractive and desirable for our children. After all, the last ones whom we want to deny are *our* children! How do we act in this terrible tension of not wanting to deprive them from something *they* cannot see as evil, yet *we* recognize it? The issue of the Cross becomes an issue right under our roofs in the kinds of acts that we are required to perform. But how do we even recognize something that seems to be innocent, and yet carries a spirit of darkness like these images I have described? How do we discern the things that are evil when they are depicted, and set before us, as being something not only innocent, but beneficial, pleasant and good to have and to enjoy? It is going to take an uncommon ability to see through the appearance of something, and to recognize the inherent evil that is in it, and the strength of character to resist it, to keep it from your household.

I think our ability to discern the things of the earth and the Devil is our proximity to heaven. The more we are citizens of heaven, the more we will be sensitive to see the contradiction of the things that are of the world and of the earth. What will be the first accusation thrown at any believer who wants to move toward a heavenly-mindedness, and looks with great suspicion on the things that are of the world and of the earth? "Intolerant, dogmatic, legalistic!" The issue of discernment is not some kind of magical ability, but relative to the authentic spirituality of an entire Body. We will either be dull, or acute, based on the quality of our corporate life, integrity and truth.

This is calling for a church that is a people *together*, whose corporate intercession makes the principalities and powers of the air ‘part’ over the place where they are. It is inevitable that such a church will be resisted, and that the powers themselves will test it, and resort even to oppression and persecution. The fact that the church at large has not been opposed up to now, is not a statement to our spirituality or maturity, but a scandal**,** and the evidence that we are not yet the church we ought to be!

The true church has always been oppressed and persecuted by the powers. It is their final act of desperation against us, even as they were desperate against Jesus. They rubbed their hands in glee when they had Him totally in their power, but He went to His death as a lamb in silence, not resisting them, but yielding Himself to that terrible power of darkness. It was by *that* ability to yield that Jesus triumphed over them. It was a final showdown, a conflict between two wisdoms, two moral orders: violent force and power in vicious brutality against a Lamb, slain from before the foundation of the world, who did not so much as open His mouth, but suffered rather in meekness and humility.

The worst that could be brought against Him revealed the best that was in Him. Utter malignancy met utter magnanimity. Satan was made an open and public display. He was ridiculed and despoiled by the very submitting of Jesus to the worst fury and vengeance, animosity and violence that the powers know. Yet the Lord did not react in kind, He did not shriek out, He did not plead for his life—but prayed for them. Hell in all of its fury met Heaven in all of its humility, meekness and long-suffering—and Heaven triumphed. That triumph is complete, but the world does not know it because the church has not demonstrated it. Jesus bruised the head of the Serpent, but it is left to the church to 'finish him off' by making an eternal demonstration of the manifold wisdom of God, not just in this age, but in the ages to come.

In the early church, no-one thought that the thing they had was their own. We are talking about Jews here, which is not an insignificant detail. It is a profound statement of the depth of the sanctifying work of God that had broken men loose from their deep selfishness. They were brought to a configuration and quality of relationship that required a new Greek word, 'Koinonea.' There was no word known for it in the Hebrew lexicon. They had come to a place of relationship that was the particular distinctive of the church. It was a quality of life of which the world knew nothing. In a word, they were a demonstration on the earth of what God's mode of relationship is in heaven, and the particular character by which He relates with Himself in His tripartite composition as the Godhead. It is a relationship of an unusual, self-giving quality by which the one exalts the other, and defers to the other. The genius of the Godhead Himself had come to earth, and was now being demonstrated by Jews, famous for their selfishness, for their holding to themselves, and for their contention. We need to recognize the genius of what the church was *at the first*. For the first expression is the pure, pristine and heavenly intention of God. A church that comes together merely for services as a conglomerate of individualities, each one going his own way, is no threat to the powers of darkness *at all*. They are only required to recognize an authenticity that is a reflection of what is in the Godhead Himself.

This subject has practical applications that will affect our daily character and posture in the world. If we see this, and if we consciously walk in the light of it, we will become acute in our spiritual discernment, and we shall begin to sense the play of these powers in the civilizations in which we occupy. We will begin to recognize their influence through institutions of education, culture and religion. There is something that God is waiting for in an entire church. It is an authority to be expressed, a quality of praise that truly ascends up, a depth of intercession that is corporate, and which will require those powers of the air to break and part, recoil, draw back and release.

The Power of True Praise

There is no deception more profound than that for which Charismatics and Pentecostals are most subject. We think, albeit unconsciously, that the euphoric thing we enjoy by our music and choruses is really the statement of our faith. *We* may enjoy it, and we *hope* that

God is being blessed also, but we need to be ruthlessly honest and gird ourselves with truth; and we need first of all to be truthful about our own condition. The true statement of our faith and the condition of our lives are what we experience in fear or apprehension about death, and about insecurity, when we stand in a tremulous place where an authority is confronting us that expresses the rule of the principalities and powers. The issue is not whether our worship pleases us or facilitates the service, but whether it is in fact worship. True worship is the statement and expression of the redemptive work of God that has been experienced in our lives authentically and corporately.

Loudness is power, and it is manipulative when the sound amplifiers are turned up. It is predicated on the notion that the powers of the air will be defeated through militant or revved up 'worship.' The moment we begin to employ worship for purposes other than worship, then it no longer is worship. God knows when there is a worship that has no strings attached. True worship is simply the adoration and devotion that God deserves because He is God. But when we make of it a manipulation and a tool toward an end, even a religiously desired end, then it is no longer worship. We are on the enemy's ground, and employing an expediency to obtain an end, and still calling it worship, and we are just as much deceived to think that a vigorous, banner-waving worship defeats the powers!

"Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are you?" may well be asked of us. "Yes, we hear your praise, and we hear your choruses, but there is something about them that is hollow. It is merely singing, and it is not, therefore, something that we are required as the rulers of darkness to acknowledge!" This is what the forces of darkness utter when they encounter a church operating in less than the fullness of its inheritance in Christ. There is a praise and worship that is mere singing, but there is also a praise that wells up to Heaven, which is more than the product of charismatic manipulation. It is a praise that is a spontaneous breaking forth of a celebration of the God who has saved us, not only out of fear, insecurity and anxiety, but who has brought us to a transcendent place of apostolic faith. That kind of praise devastates the powers of darkness.

Our call as the church to resist the Devil is not dependent upon what we *do*, but what we *are*. It is something in the *character* of the church. Our victory will be related to the quality and continuous character of the fellowship itself. So long as there is any surrender or condescension to the wisdom of those powers, for example, fear, intimidation, threat, concern for one's life and security, then the powers have a place of penetration. When they see a people who are resolute in their faith, and know that their security does not come from the world, or from their employer, or from the State, but from God, then the powers are without any weapon. There is nothing that can be attacked.

Paul and Silas' imprisonment in Acts 16 is a wonderful demonstration of the wisdom of God. At midnight they were praying and singing praises unto God. They believed that their suffering was the very consequence of their obedience, and that even though only one woman was affected by their ministry, they were in the place of obedience to the heavenly vision. It did not matter whether they would lose their lives or not, because that

was not the issue. They had such a deep faith in the sovereignty of God, and the privilege of sharing in His sufferings, that they rejoiced, and it was expressed in praise.

When you can praise God in the midst of adversity and suffering, you have the most powerful release from the powers of darkness. They cannot stand it, or bear to hear it, and they flee, because it is the overwhelming evidence of the reality of the invisible God. It contradicts their wisdom which says that when you are suffering, you are to be mourning, pouting, feeling sorry for yourself, blaming God, and accusing this man or that. But when you can praise God in the midst of your sufferings, you have ruined them. You have taken their last weapon, and they have nothing they can use anymore to threaten or to intimidate. You have broken through onto a heavenly ground. They are absolutely helpless to adversely affect you, and so they are required to flee.

The one thing that the powers of darkness are required to acknowledge is authenticity—the thing that is real. I am an enemy, therefore, to what seems to be real in worship and praise that puts such emphasis on musical ability, on instruments, on loudspeakers, on electronic technology, on song and on worship leaders. One of my greatest battles as a prophetic person is with worship leaders. Oftentimes, it happens that I have a speaking engagement, and by the time the worship is over, I am completely depleted and drained. I get up and it is a pathetic beep next to what I knew the Lord was wanting. The worship, so-called, that should have enhanced the word actually *robbed* and blunted it. There is so much emphasis on worship that almost makes the success of the church depend upon it. "Did you enjoy the worship?"—instead of it being the spontaneous expression of the redemptive work of God in the life of the believers, personally and corporately.

Jesus endured all of His suffering for the *joy* that was set before Him, in the anticipation of what would be the consequence of His suffering for eternity. This is the wisdom of God, because rejoicing in suffering is a contradiction. It is contrary to reason and *everything* we think natural to man. What is natural to man is survival, "Take care of number one." But the wisdom that can rejoice in suffering is another wisdom, and it is that wisdom which defeats the powers. It is the greater wisdom, but it is not enough just to speak it. It has got to be made manifest, to be demonstrated, by a church whose inner life is itself her proclamation of God’s manifold wisdom. Whether she speaks it or not, the very inner life itself is that thing. It becomes that through trial, through testing, through the Lord allowing oppression, heaviness of spirit—all of the kinds of things against which we have to struggle and work out in our relationships. It is becoming one as He is one, in all of the differences, all of the personalities, all of the things that come up that take the guts out of you, where you want to run and find the first Charismatic and Evangelical fellowship you can, just to be relieved from the tension of all of these demands. It is in those tensions, however, that God forms *His* character.

The Manifold Wisdom of God

I have already hinted at it manifold wisdom of God that is to be demonstrated by the church. It is the very antithesis of the wisdom of the rulers of darkness who celebrate force, violence, brutality and power. God celebrates weakness, foolishness and humility. God has chosen the foolish and weak things to confound the things that are mighty and wise. Are we majoring in foolishness? Are we willing to suffer the humiliation of weakness? Or are we reflecting more the wisdom of the powers themselves, and therefore constitute no threat to them at all? If we have any intentions of becoming an apostolic presence upon the earth, we will not only incite against ourselves the persecution of these powers, it will also be of an unspeakably vehement and cruel kind. It has historically been so, where men are not merely put to death, they have been flayed alive, sawn asunder and burnt at the stake. There is a particular kind of viciousness, cruelty and diabolical hatred that fumes in mankind against God, and wants to make those who are *His*, surrender and give up to *their* terms. But instead, it gets another response, namely, those who love their enemies, and who pray for their persecutors, and say in their dying breath, *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."*

When Stephen sighed his last breath with those words, the eternal power of that statement broke something in the powers of the air overhead that released a certain angry Jew (Saul), who experienced a 'prick' against his spirit on the road to Damascus to which he finally had to surrender. Something happens when meekness and humility meet utter viciousness. It is a demonstration of the manifold wisdom of God that these powers are obliged to recognize. For nothing else can impress them than the very nature of God and the holiness of His character under supreme duress and pressure. What is more, only suffering and extremity reveal it.

Is that not what happened on the Cross? Jesus did not writhe and groan to preserve His protoplasmic life. He *yielded* up the ghost, uttering the words, *"Father, forgive them,"* but they were heard by a certain Gentile man, a Roman centurion. He was a professional brute, a man schooled in murder and who had seen many squirm and die on the Cross, and had spat at them in disdain and contempt, for they were only men clutching their lives. But when he saw *this* God-man die magnificently under extreme duress and pain, words broke forth out of his mouth, even beyond his consciousness, *"Truly, this was the Son of God!"* He had no Biblical background whatsoever, but he was compelled to make a certain recognition of the true identity of that One who was on the Cross, by what was exhibited in His ultimate suffering unto death. And it would not have been revealed *except* at the Cross, and *except* in a suffering unto death. However brilliant Jesus was as the Son of Man and the Son of God in what He spoke and the miracles that He performed, it required *this* as a final and ultimate demonstration of the testimony of who He was and is. It constituted salvation for a man who would have otherwise eternally perished as a murderer himself, unless the acknowledgment came out of him that this indeed was the Son of God.

As Jesus walked, so also are we to walk in this world. God is waiting for one final demonstration that shall penetrate to the very heart of the cosmos itself, a demonstration

through the church in the fulfillment of the eternal purpose of God. Verbally and doctrinally, we have agreed with the wisdom of God, namely, to serve Him and to love Him, but in the condition of our lives, and the way in which we conduct ourselves in the office, in the home, in bed or by whatever area of our life, we more or less consistently subscribe to another wisdom and another way. Manipulation, teasing, seduction, and flattery all seek to bend the will of another, and are therefore evil. We are actually subscribing to the wisdom of the powers of this world, bowing and serving their gods, and doing according to their works.

How we shall react under extreme duress and persecution is the issue that is before us now. Our little impatient moods, our critical spirits, and our irritation with one another, are already evidence of how little prepared we are for this final confrontation. The very things that we have complained about in the church, namely, the trials and the irritations that come to us from other saints, are exactly the provision of God for the shaping of His godly character in us. God is wanting to move us to that ultimate place of response, that when the ultimate persecution comes, we shall stand graciously and exhibit the wisdom of God. We shall demonstrate the triumph of the Cross, and by the eternal Spirit, we shall offer ourselves up, as Jesus did in that final moment. The eternal Spirit was offering up God Himself, so that in the ultimate moment in His trial and suffering, the demonstration that was being made to the powers was the demonstration of God being *all in all*, and bringing to the core of the cosmos His quintessential Self.

When that same demonstration shall come from the church, the triumph will be complete, and the powers demolished. This is the eternal purpose of God for the church. The phrase ‘to be crucified with Christ’ is not for us an option or a luxury, but the very basis for our overcoming. For once we have experienced *that* death, and risen to newness of life, then of what shall we be afraid? This is a call for maturity, for a church to come into its fullness, according to the eternal purpose of God, which He has intended for us, and for which He has created all things. There is a purpose for our being beyond ourselves and beyond the earth, and that affects the ages to come. May we *see* our calling, and rise up to meet it, and receive every difficulty, trial and experience that comes into our life as coming from God’s hand. This will give us a new view toward suffering, and a much more realistic anticipation of our future persecution—not something for which we should mourn, but something in which we rejoice at our privilege and high calling, eternally in Him.

The Overcoming of the Saints

It takes an episode out of the life of David to show the whole conflict of wisdoms, even though that language was probably not even familiar to David. It is unlikely that he was aware of the significance of his act, but *what* he did, and *how* he acted, in a particular ‘crisis moment,’ affected the whole subsequent character of the kingdom. The *coming* Kingdom has a particular character that God is not ashamed to call ‘Davidic,’ the kingdom of David. I believe that *that* character takes its note from one episode in the life

of David *before* he became king, and probably was critical in establishing his kingship, and it will be critical for our establishment as well.

Saul's relentless pursuit of David's life, as recorded in 1 Samuel 24, is not only historical, but typical, as it represents two antibodies symbolized and summed up in both David and Saul. The conflict between them is a picture of an ages-long enmity between what these men represented in themselves. Saul stands for something visible and external, prestigious and impressive, both religious and political. Saul looked every bit the king. He had all of the externalities and outward credentials. He was an expediency that God allowed Israel because they wanted a human king to rule over them, though God Himself was their King.

We all know what kind of misrule came through Saul, and how he failed to be obedient to God. When God told him to destroy the Amalekites, their infants, the suckling, the camel, sheep, oxen, etc., he did *not* do it. He was partial in his obedience, and saved the best of the sheep and oxen for a sacrifice unto the Lord. He could not bring himself to slay the Amalekite, King Agag. It was Samuel who wept all through the night at Saul's disobedience—for partial obedience is disobedience—and who himself took a sword and hacked Agag to pieces. We need to further note that the same Saul, who could not bring himself to a complete obedience to God to slay the historical enemies of God, in only a few chapters later, destroys the whole city of Nob, a priestly community—men, women, infants and suckling, camel, sheep, oxen and ass. There was not a living thing that breathed when Saul exterminated an entire priestly community, because they had helped David in his flight.

David, on the other hand, is the insignificant, weak stripling, the guy that drools in his beard and scribbles on the door and feigns madness, who finds himself in a cave and is joined by the poor, the depressed and the down-and-out. There is something so very rich in what these two men represent, and the one is absolutely and utterly hostile to the other. That is also a picture of the Last Days—an institutional Church, a religious system, be it nominal or evangelical, opposing with vehemence and bitterness the Davidic people of God, the remnant people.

The kingly person that men tend to celebrate cannot tolerate the life of the seemingly insignificant one who sees himself as but a flea. It is a timeless, classic contest until the end, and those who are anointed, regardless of their external unimpressiveness, will be harried and pursued by the inexplicably vexed, who cannot abide their very existence. Somehow those humble ones are not fit to live in their sight. And the offense cannot even be identified, for what brings the offended to a boil is the very foolishness of what the other is, unselfconsciously in God. What is it about David that so infuriated Saul? Why should a helpless and insignificant young man so antagonize a man of power and religious and political authority? Whatever that something is, it is going to be the very ingredients of the Last Days.

That very weakness, that very God-dependency, in contrast to those who have in themselves expertise and ability, is the very thing that antagonizes. To be weak, foolish

and to be dependent upon God is exactly what infuriates a people who are religious, but who establish their religious proficiency on the basis of their own ability and what *they* have raised up, and what *they* can do.

Through the centuries, the great Church bodies, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, could equally not abide the presence in their midst of those who were concerned only to live in that same foolish trust in God. What kind of threat could they have conceivably constituted for those great monoliths that they could not be permitted to live? They were persecuted; they were pursued; they were tied back-to-back and drowned in rivers and lakes; they were burned at the stake and ignominiously dumped in dungeons to rot. There was a ventilating of spite against them, because in their weakness and in their inoffensiveness, they represented something that threatened the powers of darkness.

I do not believe we have really comprehended what the true nature of overcoming is. Daniel speaks of the 'horn' that shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and who *"was waging war with the saints and overpowering them"* (Daniel 7:21b). The Book of Revelation compounds the mystery yet more by adding: *"And it was given to him (the Beast) to make war with the saints and to overcome them …"* (Revelation 13:7a). How mind-boggling to consider that God allows a devastation to come to the church by the enemy of our souls, so as to overcome us.

We are never going to be victorious in some macho way by taking authority and shouting down the enemy or taking cities 'for Christ,' when the Scriptures seem to indicate another kind of scenario. God actually allows the believing remnant church to be overcome. "And it was given to him (the Beast) to make war with the saints and to overcome them" is a final statement of the condition of the church in the Last Days. Daniel says the same thing. It seems like a contradiction, so how, then, is that a victory? In both the Old Testament book of apocalypse, Daniel, and in the New Testament book of apocalypse, John's Revelation, the saints are overcome. They are defeated and vanquished. God allows that, but where is the victory?

We have perhaps imagined that *"not loving our life even unto death"* means that we bravely summon a final courage to withstand all harassment, and somehow make it right to the end. But what if the overcoming is *in the dying?* It is not the issue of dying, but the issue of *how* we die. Why are we allowed to be overcome? What demonstration is made in the wisdom of God in being overcome that finally defeats the powers and compels their being ejected out of heavenly places? It is something that takes place, not in the victory as we thought it to be in the human sense, but something that we demonstrate in *being* overcome. We *overcome* in being overcome, and unless we understand that, and anticipate that, and prepare for that, and experience it even now in some measure, then we will *not* demonstrate it when it is required.

The Davidic Kingdom

There came a critical moment in David's life, a remarkable moment and a radical moment that reveals everything. Something was performed in the character of God that distinguished the wisdom of God from the wisdom of the powers of darkness. The powers of darkness will do anything to get their way. They will seduce, they will intimidate, and they will threaten. They have no scruples. They will do anything that is immoral, amoral and vile. God's ends, however, must and can *only* be obtained by God's means, and His means must be consistent with His ends. They must be in the same character and kind. We cannot 'take the Kingdom' or 'establish' it in any way that is different, or other than, in keeping with the character of God Himself. If the church begins to use manipulation in altar calls by playing on emotions, or getting people to come forward by some kind of psychological manipulation, then it is not in keeping with the character of the Kingdom. We have to be very careful, not only about our ends, but about our means, or else we contradict all that God is about.

A moment will come, completely unsuspecting, uncontemplated, and with suddenness. There is no time then to prepare ourselves. What is revealed *then* is what in fact we really are. What we are, having been formed at the hand of God, then comes to bear, and this is the moment that came to David. He was being pursued by Saul, and hid himself in a cave with his men, and Saul came into that very cave to relieve himself. David's men said to him,

> "Hey, this is that moment of which God spoke, that your enemy would come into your own hand, that you might do with him whatever you think good to do." (paraphrased)

His men expected, of course, that David would kill his persecutor, and thereby get rid of the nuisance. It was a critical moment, and David was free in that moment to do what he would choose to do, and we also are going to have such moments—if not daily. Is there any greater freedom than to be a son or daughter of the living God? For all of the talk about freedom to those who are in bondage, to be *free* in Christ is to be *free* indeed. What we are, and what we choose to do when we are free to choose what we will, and what we choose to think when we are free to think what we will, is in fact what *we are*. It is what we do out of our freedom that is our testimony to the powers of darkness.

What David did intuitively by cutting the corner of Saul's robe, and not taking the life of Saul, without any awareness of the significance of that act eternally, is what we will be required to perform in the eternal purposes of God. Our doing, therefore, must also be Davidic in its character as well as in its deed. This is the manifold wisdom of God. Not to see our life in such a context is simply not to see, and nullifies us as being the church, nor can we be the key to, and agent of, Israel's final restoration. In other words, God is waiting for the demonstration of His manifold wisdom, and that the same church that demonstrates it, is also the key and the very agent of Israel's final restoration.

This wisdom was reflected in the conduct of David in the supreme moment that came to him in his flight from Saul. He cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly, and it came about afterward that his conscience bothered him for doing that act. If you want a glimpse into the heart of David, and the character of David, it is precisely here. David was sensitive in his conscience, and the very cutting of Saul's robe bothered him. What kind of a man is this? I do not know whether we can even understand it. We are products of another age that defaces public buildings, defiles the streets with its litter, and desecrates life with its profanity. If you travel in Europe, you see the graffiti everywhere on buildings. It is a horror, a demonic and vile thing that shows a complete absence of respect for property. When you begin with an absence of respect for property, it is not long before you will be brought to an absence of respect for life. What a contrast with David, whose conscience troubled him just to touch the robe of this king, and that he could say,

> "Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed. (1 Samuel 24:6b)"

David is talking about an apostate and backslidden king, who is soon to suffer his own destruction. This is the man who calls on witches, who calls up the spirits of dead men, and who performed his own sacrifice rather than wait for Samuel. Everything about Saul is contemptible, and yet David respects him, not because of his conduct, but because of his office. David respects the Lord, whose anointing once came upon that man. It is a respect for authority. It does not matter how Saul failed. The anointing is so precious that even when the meaning has been forfeited for which it had been given, a respect for the office, and the person, is a respect and honoring of the God who conferred it.

Has the church given to Israel, though Israel is backslidden and apostate, the measure of respect for what its place once was in God? History has shown that the Church has exhibited to Israel contempt and disdain, because she had not this attitude toward a people, who had once enjoyed the anointing of God. We have been guilty of demonstrating a 'spirit of requirement.' We do not know what unconditional love and unconditional acceptance is. In other words, unless you prove yourself, and demonstrate something, you are not worthy to receive our acceptance, let alone our affection. We do not know what honoring or respect means, and have subscribed more than we know to another kind of wisdom that demands conditions.

> And David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way. (1 Samuel 24:7)

And what was his way? The way of a murderer; the way of an implacable man bent on the destruction of that which he sees as a threat to his kingdom. To allow Saul to go was to invite one's own death. This needs to sink into our understanding. It was more than just a bit of graciousness on David's part. To allow Saul to get up and to go, was for David to sign his own death warrant. It is clear though that Saul's tears were 'crocodile tears.'

> "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me; while I have dealt wickedly with you. And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the Lord delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the Lord therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day." (vv 17b–19)

It is only a matter of time before those tears will dry, and he will be back at it, pursuing and hunting David, until he has got his life. For David to allow that man to go was to put his own life on the line. Is true righteousness really righteousness if it does not cost us anything, and does not involve a threat to our life? The garments that clothe the saints of the Last Days are made up by their righteous deeds. David's act was a righteous deed in letting his persecutor go, because it came at the cost of his own life. He could rightly count himself as a dead man. It would only be a matter of time before Saul would succeed in killing him, unless God Himself would be his Deliverer. This is the manifold wisdom of God. It is not some abstract thing, but an absolute confidence in God, that unless God preserves us, we simply will not be preserved. It requires that we do nothing to maintain our own life, and we should not condescend to any expediency to do it.

How many of us are condescending to expediencies right now that have so much less to do than the issue of our survival? Just the issue of our sex life involves us in expediencies, techniques and things to arouse. The way in which we manipulate one another, or our children, or wives with their husbands, or husbands with wives, or pastors with congregations, shows that we are quite free to condescend to 'stretching forth our arm.' That is a symbolic statement that employs an expediency to obtain our end. David's faith, however, was to let God judge and vindicate. He would not stretch forth his arm. The fact that he cut Saul's robe was killing him in itself, but he would not touch God's anointed. We need to remember also that David was a man of war. He was no pacifist, and could be ruthless when he had to, but here he would not stretch forth his arm to save his own life.

We must not miss this statement that David makes:

> "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea?" (v 14)

David is not playing on words here. The fact that he is a man of war, and *still* refuses to stretch forth his hand to kill when he has someone defenseless at his beck, is all the more a profound statement of the revelation of God and His Kingdom. I do not think David demonstrated a self-effacing, false humility. This is a man who really thinks that he *is* a dead dog and a flea. Only if you think *that,* will you be willing to let your life out, and that if God does not preserve it, so be it. There is nothing that important about me that I should hold my life as dear unto myself. It is not for myself, but for Him. If He is more glorified by my death than by my living, so be it. For what am I, after all, without Him, but a dead dog and a flea. Our basic error is our error concerning ourselves. We think we have a right to preserve the creaturely thing we are. We are dead men who have been

brought back from the dead, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, no longer to live for ourselves, but unto *Him*. That is what it says in Romans 6, but that is not what is said by our living! By our living, we are more like Saul than like David. We do the thing that is expedient, we pursue our own interests, and rise against the thing that threatens us.

Our attitude toward religious bodies, even defunct governments, will be critical in manifesting the wisdom of God. If the enemy can bring us onto his ground, where we would rail against something, or complain, or be contemptuous, or critical in an ungodly way, then they have won the game. Our conduct, our attitude, our spirit, and what we allow in our hearts, is critical.

While Jesus was hanging on the Cross, He was railed at with the jeers and the taunts by the very people for whom He came and died, *"Come down and we will believe you!"* If anything is calculated to vex a man, it is that the people for whom you are a sacrifice do not even recognize, or appreciate it. Furthermore, they are tormenting you verbally in your anguish, suffering, and death. But Jesus replied not a word, not a syllable. It was not because He was biting His lips that He held back, but it simply was not in Him to be expressed. The crisis revealed what was in Him, and what was in Him was the character of God in patient forbearance, in suffering, in mercy and forgiveness. The Son revealed the Father.

David's deference to Saul is contrary to the wisdom of this age, the wisdom by which the world lives its life. When nothing else will work, men will stretch forth their hands in violence, and justify it in order to obtain their ends. In the last analysis, you can know the true faith, because it will never resort to violence to obtain its ends. That religion that purports to be of God, and requires violence to obtain its ends, is by its very demonstration necessarily false. We have to be careful about violence ourselves, not only in deed, but in speech.

David even calls Saul his father,

> "Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand!" (v 11a)

David is not trying to ingratiate himself with his enemy. He really believed in his heart that Saul was his father. He had a son's respect for an older man as a father, though the man was anything but a father. He failed in every category, but from David's spiritual view, from the heavenly view, Saul was his father. Can you see the Lord looking down over the brim of Heaven with His angelic escorts to see what David would do in that moment when he was free to do what he thinks is right in his own sight? The whole future of the Kingdom of God was hanging on *that* moment, and more than that, a descendent from David's own loins would one day be the Messiah of all mankind. If David was cut off, then that line would be cut off, and the whole Messianic succession destroyed. Many of us will compromise at just that point, "Well, I am willing to give my life, but my ministry … Don't you know what is resting on my ministry? If I do not

continue in my ministry, the nations will perish, because I am God's man of faith and power for the world!"

Now David could have said, "Okay, if it is just my life, then let Saul take it. But listen, I am called to be the king of Israel, and out of my very loins will come a descendant, who will be the King forever, and the salvation of all mankind. When I see the intention of God for my life, then it has *got* to be preserved." David, however, would *not* say that, for he knew that if God could not preserve what pertains to Him, then he himself would not do it by stretching out his hand. What David did in that moment had eternal ramifications, and the powers of the air knew it in the moment of that act.

How many of us see divorce as violence? It is a tearing of a relationship asunder, and we justify doing it in the name of preserving 'our' ministries, because the wisdom by which we are moved is self-preservation. To exalt our ministry is only disguising the fact that it is really our *self* that is implicated in that ministry. We are hiding behind it. Likewise, if our wife is an irritant, or counterproductive, or opposes us, then we think that we can justify the violence of divorce. How few have faulted us for so doing, and with what scant interruption do we continue 'our important service' with a new and more attractive spouse! Few remember that there was once another wife, and we go on as ever, just as popular, and the moment passes and people forget. The ministry becomes everything, and the issue of the eternal purpose of God demonstrated through the church suffers a setback, because we have condescended to the wisdom of the world in what was expedient for our satisfaction. David would not allow himself this luxury, even though it was *his* life, and what would issue from his life at stake. God must be trusted for that fulfillment, and not the stretching forth of one's own hand in expediency.

This is the demonstration of the meekness of the Davidic kingdom. It is the willingness to allow one's life to be expended rather than to do what in fact Jesus could have done in calling down legions of angels. Like David, He had all power in His hand to do away with His tormentors. Like David, however, He *could not* save Himself, because He was the King of another Kingdom. He simply could and would not, because it was contrary to His nature to save Himself.

The School of Obedience

When Jesus overturned the moneychangers' tables, that act of violence was more against property than against men. He overturned the tables, but He did not overturn men. It was an act of meekness, though it was violent in its character. It was an obedience to God, probably even contrary to the very disposition of Jesus Himself. It came in the moment of God's own choosing, to validate the Messianic claim of Jesus in His jealousy for the Father's house. Meekness is not 'walking on eggshells.' If God requires you to roar like a lion, or to act in that kind of vehemence in the moment of His choosing, then *not* to do that would be arrogant. To submit is to be meek, all the more if it is contrary to your own disposition.

David calls out to the astonished Saul,

> "May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord avenge on you; but my hand shall not be against you." (v 13)

The confidence that David is exhibiting is more than bravado. It is predicated on a deep knowledge of God and trust in His sovereignty, that even if God should allow him to be Saul's victim, then so be it. It is an ultimate faith that will allow our persecutors to be free to come back, and do us in.

That is what Stephen believed when he gave his life. He had finished his earthly course, and there was no resentment on his part toward God. His martyrdom had repercussions that Stephen knew nothing about, namely, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. There was something in Stephen's death that haunted him. Saul (Paul) had never seen a man die more gloriously, and he could not escape the witness exhibited in the magnanimity and graciousness of Stephen's death. Mere religion cannot produce that witness. It took a demonstration of the character of God in a Stephen, a man who was so below Saul's own prestigious status as the prize student of the Rabbi Gamaliel, and when God reveals His character in the weak and undistinguished to a man of such prestige, then *that* is a devastating revelation of God.

The powers of darkness had such a hold on Paul that they could make a murderer out of his religious intensity. I do not think that Paul could have been broken and converted, except that there was before him a demonstration of something that could loose the principalities and powers of the air. It was the supreme triumph of the wisdom of God.

It is also the mystery of the church toward the Jew, because, in the sight of Jews, Gentiles leave something to be desired. We Jews see ourselves as so much more superior—ethically, morally, intellectually and culturally—but if we see in a Gentile face, and in his or her character, the demonstration of *our* God, whom we do not know, and from whom we have been alienated, then down we come on our faces. It is the very same principle. God did not think that the sacrifice of Stephen was too extravagant to effect the salvation of Saul, and to make of him the chief apostle to the church. The church must again be a Stephen, martyr-people as a final demonstration to a Jewish Saul-like nation, that cannot be saved on any ground less than this demonstration. The issue is not whether you are beheaded, or that you are actually made a martyr, its whether you have *lived* as a martyr, and were *willing* for a martyr's death, whether or not your life was required. Some will be sawn asunder, some will be decapitated, but some will remain, though barely surviving persecution, and others may not be touched at all. The heart attitude of martyrdom distinguishes those who rise at the first resurrection—those whose lives are not dear unto themselves.

What precipitated the fury of those people in Stephen's martyrdom, that they put their fingers in their ears and gnashed upon him with their teeth, and could not be satisfied until they had stoned the life out of him? What did he say? He had given them a long history of Israel, and then he came to a final climax,

> "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did." (Acts 7:51)

We need to remember that he is talking to the eminent leaders of the religious world. As they gnashed upon him, Stephen said,

> "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56b)

When they heard *that*, Stephen was finished. It was the statement of someone in the presence of God, and the place of authority, that once and for all meant the end to the false authority that his persecutors had established in their own religious institutions or fellowships. The powers of the air resident in them rose to such a fury. They were the ones who sent Jesus to His crucifixion, and in ventilating their characteristic wisdom of power unto death upon Him, Jesus was elevated through resurrection and ascension. That is the nexus of the same fury ventilated against Stephen in making that announcement. They ventilated their spite and venom against this one whose face shone like an angel, and who made that announcement to them.

Even Saul had to acknowledge to David,

> "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you." (v 17b)

David's act revealed a greater wisdom—a righteousness greater than the Pharisees. It is not the righteousness of impeccably maintained principles, but that of the forfeiture of one's life, and *that alone* releases or demonstrates the very nature of God, and *that* is what reveals God's glory, for the nature of God *is* the wisdom of God.

Both the Creator and creation are groaning and travailing, waiting for the manifestation of such 'Davids.' This age will end by a church of the same character by what is revealed in extremity as was demonstrated by Jesus, Stephen and David. We may have a right to contend as sufferers of injustice and oppression, but there is a wisdom and a greater power revealed in not contending. It is an ultimate expression of trust in God. In this way, the false wisdom is revealed as false, and its captives are set free. For by so doing, the ultimate validity of eternity that alone frees men from the intimidating tyranny of fear for this life is established. This is a liberating freedom. Wherever there is on earth in this present world a congregation freed from the false wisdom of the principalities and powers, consistently and unselfconsciously displayed, there the kingdom of David is also revealed.

Chapter 4 - Apostolic Proclamation: The Mystery of Preaching

If we are called to anything, it is to be the bearers of God's word. There is a profusion of speaking, welters of tapes and videos, yet in the midst of it all, there is little that can be labeled the word of the Lord. We need a deep and new perception of this 'holy sacrament.'

The first statement of the anointed ministry of Jesus took place in the synagogue at Nazareth, where He was handed the scroll of Isaiah, and commenced to read from the sixty-first chapter.

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach … (Luke 4:18a)

There is a conjunction between anointing and preaching, and any preaching that is not anointed is not preaching, but mere oratory. There is, therefore, a peculiar and particular quality that distinguishes *apostolic* or *true* proclamation from all other speaking. This is a remarkable life and death phenomenon because:

> How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? (Romans 10:14–15a)

This is the heart of the whole mission calling of the church, particularly to the Jew. The unbelieving world is waiting for a certain kind of speaking which I want to call 'apostolic proclamation.' It is the preaching of one who is *sent*. He whom *God* sends is given the Spirit without measure. This sending is critical, therefore, for which reason God establishes sending communities.

True preaching, or the devising of a sermon, is to be confronted with a contradiction. Preaching is a category unto itself. It is in the realm of the impossible. We have many men today who are glib, and who know how to play on words. They have even made careers out of their ability to speak. If you are attractive, have the gift of the gab, and a winsomeness with men, you can go far in the religious world today. True preaching, however, cannot come from this world. It is altogether a divine and supernatural phenomenon. It is the word of *life*. It quickens the *dead*. The hearing of it constitutes an 'event.' It sets in motion things that have a myriad of consequences, and has a power and a life unto itself. It is a word that is *sent*.

Ironically, this kind of speaking has to find expression through the mouth of an earthly vessel standing before men, and *that* is a formula for disaster. It is the bringing together of the most disparate contradictions, that if you really understand it, or have to perform it, it is nothing less than excruciating. There is, however, no greater joy than expressing the

burden that God has given to people who draw out His heart, and who therefore hear and receive God's word. Likewise, there is no greater anguish than the word to be stopped up in your mouth because your listeners are not hearing. Neither does yesterday's success guarantee today's. It is the same trembling, the same fear, the same uncertainty, and the same overwhelming sense of the patent impossibility of the task. This paradox, and the terrible contradiction of it, have got to register deeply in our consciousness, namely, that the word of God is going to come out of the mouth of an earthly, human vessel, but the word itself is divine and heavenly. It is not as if the instrumentality is some utilitarian thing that is objective, and does not participate in the process. The speaker is very much involved, because the Lord employs the man's personality, his accent, his disposition, and his heart.

Preaching is a struggle and an ultimate challenge every time it is undertaken. One can make many good biblical statements, but *that* is not the same as communicating the word *as* God's word. This latter phenomenon *alone* has the power to constitute 'an event' instead of merely communicating biblical knowledge. We need to distinguish between the two things, and probably ninety-five per cent of all Christian preaching and teaching is teaching *about* God, or making biblical statements of interesting and insightful kinds, but does not constitute the expression of the word *as* God's word. We have become so attenuated to hearing the 'other,' that if it is biblical and doctrinally sound, we think that that is true preaching. We have, however, misunderstood the utterly supernatural character of communicating the word of God, and therefore our hearers remain unchanged. We are not going from faith to faith, and from glory to glory, because we have not gone from 'event' to 'event.' We have only gone from the predictable to the predictable, and if it is clean and biblically sound, we come away with some measure of satisfaction, but we will remain unchanged.

It is a mystery, and the whole church needs to have a standard set before it higher than what it has understood, and to realize the patent impossibility of the word of God *as* the word of God. We dare not come up to the platform, open the Bible, clear our throats, call the congregation to attention, pray a prayer, open our mouths and commence without a terrible sense of foreboding of all of the great weight that falls upon *that* moment. If it is *not* the word of God, there will be a form of death going forth, instead of life. There is no neutrality here. Either it is going to forward the life of God, or there is going to be a numbness and dullness by just hearing something that is 'merely' good. We would probably be better off *not* to hear it at all! Silence is more to be desired than a mere good sermon, which *cannot* communicate the Life of God as God's word. The result is a deadening of spiritual sensibility.

The Word of the Cross

> For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

It is my contention that the word of the Cross is the power of God, that is to say, it contains an inherent, divinely penetrating ability to register divine truths despite the severest religious, cultural and ethnic resistance. Furthermore, it creates faith so as to believe unto salvation. It is the word of God as event, not under auspicious circumstances but inauspicious, which is to say, an event *despite* resistance. It performs a work in them that believe, or a work that has brought them to the place of believing. It is a heavenly word proclaimed in the earth, not only to those who are willing hearers, but also to resistant hearers. Earth resists heaven, and every power of darkness wants to cloud the minds of men, and keep them from understanding and responding. It requires, therefore, a word of an ultimate kind.

The phrase 'word of God' is not so much a generic terminology but more literally a word 'of God.' This is how we turn a holy thing into a cliché. We are apt to assume that anything that is biblically orientated, and seemingly correct, is the word of God. This is false assumption. The word of God is rather a divine communication of a uniquely powerful kind, expressed through a human vessel. Paul's own acute awareness of the phenomenon is expressed in the first epistle to the Thessalonians:

> And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. (Chapter 1:13)

Paul could rightly boast, and we need to read this, not as generous rhetoric, but as a literal and accurate description of a particular mode of speaking, rare in our own time. If the distinctive nature of this communication is its power, what then is its character? Paul is careful to instruct his Greek correspondents, contrary to their own culture and love of rhetoric, that the preaching of the gospel can actually be voided of its power if it is expressed in the eloquent wisdom of men. The word of God is something altogether and qualitatively different from that, and if we lapse into a human eloquence, we void the statement of its power.

The word of the Cross is not necessarily the statement or description of the actual crucifixion of Jesus. It should be better understood as the word *describing* the Cross. There is another meaning implicit in it, and though the Cross itself may not be the subject matter, it can yet be 'the word of the Cross.' The substance of that event, replicated in the humiliation of the preaching itself, is the reenactment of the 'Cross experience.' Every time the Cross is reenacted in any humiliation that comes from an obedience, the power that was demonstrated at the Cross in the first, is again given opportunity to be expressed proportionate to the degree to what is actually borne or suffered in that humiliation.

True preaching is humiliation; true witness is humiliation; true prayer is humiliation. Humiliation is another word for suffering unto death, and wherever that dynamic takes place in truth, then the power of God will always attend it. The reason we do not see the power of God in preaching is that men take pains to avoid humiliation by being assured that they are going to get through the moment by using preparatory notes, outlines and other dependencies that will ensure that they 'get by.' We are unwilling to take the risk of failure by standing with our face sticking out, and trusting the operation of God in the moment for the word. There is a place for preparation, but in the event itself, room must be made for God. And if we insulate God by our own religious, human and professional preparation, we void the operation of the Cross, and the foolishness of it, namely, the suffering and the humiliation, and therefore the *power* of the Cross.

The Scandal of the Cross

The preaching, or proclamation, that is salvational is more than the transmission of information or knowledge *about* the gospel. It is not the relating of information about salvation, or how to attain it, or the facts of the gospel *per se*, but rather a supernatural event that creates faith in the hearer through the operation of the power of God. It is the demonstration of its power because it is very God as He chose to reveal Himself in His own final and ultimate extremity.

Crisis reveals, and what was revealed at the crisis of the Cross was God, not as we think Him to be, but as He in fact is. Christ on the Cross is a scandal. God hung naked unable to cover His private parts because His hands were nailed, and all the while listening to the jeers and taunts of His people, *"Come down and we will believe You."* It is an unbelievable scene of uttermost degradation and humiliation, and God bore that. *"Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart."* It is a revelation of God as He is, and instead of railing back at those who were taunting Him, He said, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

A preacher who thus intentionally voids himself in trust for a word *of God* to be given experiences a suffering in measure akin to that of the crucified Christ. He is dying to his own ability to speak, and becomes foolish in a humiliation like the Savior's—unto death. This is the heart of all true speaking. The man speaking sees to it that his own ability will not be his dependency. He is the humble recipient of something that is to be given. There is a suffering, a humiliation and a death in the speaking that releases the same quality of power that took place at the Cross, and will again, in every reenactment of that event. God does not want the faith of men to be established on eloquence, but on the basis of the power of God, which is released through the one who is willing to suffer the terrible humiliation.

The preaching that is power comes when a man abandons himself, and will not lean on his own expertise or ability. Pulling out *that* plug is the death. It is something one can never get used to, but is to be tasted again and again. It is as terrifying, contradictory, and

mortifying as if you had never done it before. Every occasion is a fresh experience in death, and only one who is dead to himself will bear it. Who is there that is willing to taste that death? Who is willing to abandon his trusted ability and confidence, and trust that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will now raise the speaker and his message?

In a word, the very obedience of suffering unto death by which the veil of the Temple was rent, is again, by the obedience of the preacher, sundered over the understanding and darkened mind of the hearer, not only to emit light on what is otherwise patently foolish and offensive to human sensibility, but to birth or create the grace of repentance and faith unto believing. The veil was rent in the crucifixion of Jesus, and is rent every time again, when the same power is released by the same humiliation. This time it is not the veil in the Temple, but the veil over the heart and understanding.

The Creative Word

A correctly recited word out of the Bible does not make it the *word of God.* It is only the word of God when it is the word *given,* and that word does not necessarily have to be a scriptural quotation to be the word of God. It could be a word of mocking, insult, confrontation, or a strange and foolish word, but it is a word that must be given, and that word is attested to by the power of God. Those who speak the *words of* God have already come to a sufficient death to themselves that the power, or life of God, can be meted out to them without any fear that the glory of God will be touched or misappropriated. A man who will bear God's words and speak them can be trusted—however offensive they might be to the hearer and even to himself.

In the absence of the deep conversions effected by the preaching in our own generation, one wonders if we have sufficiently considered the meaning of the word 'sent,' and have naively assumed that *any* promulgation of the gospel is as blessed and honored of God. Likewise, it is perhaps wise also to consider whether any message, however correct, is indeed the word of God, especially if it was humanly contrived to avoid the very humiliation which I am suggesting. If 'preaching Christ' is *more* than the message about Him, but the showing forth *of* Him, then the God who sends may yet be waiting for suitable candidates. The issue is the issue of the Cross, and one might rightly suspect that it will not come to men with full conviction, except through the lips of those who know the Cross in their own experience, and are willing to suffer the humiliation of it again and again in the very foolishness of their speaking. If our speaking is not a foolishness, it is not a true speaking. It may amuse men, it may even inform and inspire, but it will never be an event.

Our own generation, like that of the Corinthians to whom Paul wrote, bears a greater affinity for sophistication and self-adulation than the God who made Himself of no reputation. A true preaching requirement, rightly considered, will enable us to think often of our wretchedness and a healthy contempt for ourselves and our ability. To preach is

not the issue of skill or learned technique, but a divine mystery, and the very word 'preaching' is derived from the Latin word *praedikare*, which means 'to make known.' Whenever Christ's humiliation is explicated in the foolishness of preaching, He is again revealed and set forth to be a Savior. For just as God gives grace to the humble, so also does He, who is full of grace and truth, have opportunity to intersect time and eternity, heaven and earth in the moment of authentic meekness when a preacher ceases from himself.

A familiar illustration of this cruciform life is to be found in 1 Corinthians where Paul exclaims:

> And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:1–2)

For all of Paul's erudition and religious knowledge, this kind of self-imposed limitation required a painful determination. The trouble is that we know so much, and there is so much that we know that wants to find expression. It requires, therefore, a determination to put away what is so accessible and available to our preaching.

True preaching, or the authoritative word, is a word that produces change, and establishes a reality that was not there before the speaking of it. A whole respect and reverence for the word of God, as preached, needs to be elevated in the church. God says that He has exalted His word above His Name. In the beginning was the Word, and it was the Spirit of God who brooded across the face of the deep before a creation that was yet without form, and God spoke and said: *"Let there be light."* We need increasingly to have an anticipation for this kind of apostolic speaking, of men bringing us the word, not just to strengthen our understanding, but to actually *establish* our foundations.

The Word that Performs a Work

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:11–13,

> Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own Kingdom and glory. And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

This was not some abstract believing. They believed that the word that had come to them through a man was not the word of man, but the very word of God itself. And because

they believed *that*, it performed a work in them. This is how God changes us from glory to glory—by the word that performs a work.

That word had nothing to do with Paul's own selection. He had only one thing before him and that was to be obedient to speak the word that was given, and which alone performs a work in those who hear and believe. If we choose not to believe that, then that same word becomes for us just another word, one that we like, or do not like, one that is interesting, or not interesting, and thus we lose the entire value, and the word, therefore, cannot perform its work.

All too often we come to the place of assembly with a weary kind of resignation, and the mentality that it is *just* another service, but it was not so in the beginning. They came in anticipation of a 'creative event' by the word that was spoken, and by such continual speaking, they were moved from glory to glory. How else shall we go from where we presently are to where God bids us 'apostolically' to be, except by the word that is sent, and by the word that is spoken. That puts an incredible responsibility on the bearer of the preached word. His union with the Lord needs to be of an authentic kind, or else his listeners are merely sermonized from Sunday to Sunday.

We need a whole *qualitative* elevation of our faith, and a jealousy to not speak anything other than the word that is *given* by God. There has got to be for us a motivation more than our reputation as speakers, or the fear of men, or our concern not to offend, or disappoint. Perhaps there could not be a healthier tonic for the church itself than to introduce them to silence, and to announce to their astonishment that the one who is going to speak has not a word to speak from God, and that he is not going to fill the silence with some merely good thing. This is the type of jealousy to which we must return if we are going to have what Paul speaks of in his first letter to the Thessalonians.

The Place of Communion

> And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel. (Exodus 25:22)

I am glad that the Lord uses the word 'commandment' rather than the word 'suggestion.' This is why we as the church at large are so infantile, that is to say, nothing is required of us other than to bring our bodies to the Sunday service, put a few dollars in the collection plate, and sing a few choruses. There is no requirement, no authoritative word expressed toward us, and no demand made. The sermon becomes a performance, a part of the requirement of the 'church-hour.' It is a sermonizing rather than an event, and we pay a heavy and severe price for these things. We are not receiving the creative word that changes, and therefore something negative is happening—a dulling of our spirits, a dulling of our discernment, and the creating of an atmosphere of drowsiness in our

congregations. There has been too much professionalism, in both the preachers, and the laymen. The word that is ‘given’ is weighty, and we know it when we hear it. It makes a particular demand upon our attention, and likewise a requirement in our obedience. That kind of word can only come out of the council of God.

This same principle must apply in the words we speak, even in conversation, or as we exhort one another daily, or speak the truth in love. Is it mere human opinion that is being expressed, or God’s very word? We need to call a moratorium on all casual speaking, and wait upon God for a renewing of our reverence for the spoken word, not just from platforms and pulpits, but even in our daily conversations, and even what we are speaking to the world. I have seen the judgment of God come to fellowships on the basis of words that I have spoken. I never used the wording, "Thus saith the Lord, such and such will happen to you if you will not do this or that." I merely spoke to them a word from God, and they chose not to receive it *as God’s word.* They discounted it as being only a man’s opinion, and now those fellowships no longer exist.

The Requirement of the Word

The coming of God in His word has a consequence. Jesus said,

> If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. (John 15:22)

In other words, "My appearing and My speaking have removed from you all pretense. The truth has come in Myself, and now you are responsible. Before I came, you had an excuse for your superficiality, and for your religious ‘carryings on,’ that you thought was the real thing, but now that I have come, now that I have *spoken*, you have no excuse. The divine standard has fallen. The reality of God, the revelation of His purposes has been presented, and now you are responsible for that. You *cannot* go on as you were before."

I am increasingly experiencing the audacity to say to congregations, "You are going to be sorry you invited me, because after I have spoken, you will now be responsible—and that *eternally*. If you choose to reject what comes, then be assured that you cannot go on as you were before. You will either fall back to something much less, even than you had before, or you go on to a qualitatively new thing." The apostolic word is a revelatory event for the fellowship or individual, coming from one who is *sent*, who bears the word of God, and to whom has been given the Spirit without measure.

When God speaks, something has got to give. If we do not want to give that something, then there is going to be a tension of resistance and rejection of the word. If people cannot find their opportunity to oppose the word by virtue of rejecting the word, they will find their point of opposition in rejecting the man. It seems God always gives them something to fasten on. There will always be something if men want to find a way to

absolve themselves from the implications and requirements of God's word. Yet at the same time, for the man who is bringing it, he is not to employ it as an excuse, where if he has defect he says, "Well, that is what God uses." He needs to be grieved over the fact that there is *any* defect, and seek in every way to rectify and make right, and to be impeccable and without offense before God and man. However earnest he will be in that, men will *still* find offense. They found it in Jesus, and they will find it in us, but *"… blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me"* (Luke 7:23b)—or "from stumbling over him whom I *send*, which is the very expression of Myself."

True Preaching Waits on True Sending

Everything rests on the one preaching as being 'sent.' The community, therefore, who sends him must be of one kind with him, and share the same mentality and Cross-centeredness. God would not say, *"Set apart for Me …,"* except that the man was *already* set apart and separated, and could therefore be sent by the laying on of hands by people of like mind, heart and spirit. The man sent is being sent *in place of Christ,* and those who are hearing him are hearing exactly what they would have heard had Christ come in Himself. To be sent is much more than being commissioned; it is rather to be sent in place of another, and the Other is Christ Himself, and it is through us that they hear Christ's voice and speech.

> But what does it say? "the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "whosoever believes in him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; "whoever will call upon the name of the lord will be saved." How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "how beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" However, they did not all heed the glad tidings for Isaiah says, "lord, who has believed our report?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:8–17)

This can be reduced to some kind of formula by putting before the consideration of the hearer something they can repeat, some kind of mechanical knee-jerk action, a kind of 'easy believism.' Regrettably, this methodology characterizes most of our modern day evangelism, and has left many outside the kingdom. They have recited something they were encouraged to repeat, and have missed the whole profound point. There is a certain

kind of hearing that is required for a certain kind of believing, and requires, therefore, a certain kind of preaching, and a certain kind of word.

Paul is actually citing from the Book of Isaiah where the prophet says,

> How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7)

This verse, however, is preceded by something remarkable in verse 6,

> Therefore My people shall know My name; therefore in that day I am the one who is speaking, 'Here I am.'

I want to take the liberty of saying that 'announce' means *pronounce* or *proclaim*. It is not merely an announcement, but a word that constitutes an event in the sounding of it. 'Announcement' does not quite get at the distinctive of true preaching. The word is not merely informative, or something inspiring, but a creative 'rhema' breath of God, in the hearing of which an event occurs. Faith is established where there was none before.

God does not say a word to us about propounding the faith to others in some systematic way by which their logic can be satisfied, and that they can be won over by some kind of invincible logic of statements. He says rather that the key to their believing, and their calling on the name of the Lord, is the hearing of a particular word, namely, the *word of Christ.* It is not the word *about* Christ, though necessarily that will be the subject, but the word *of* Christ Himself. The feet of those who bear good news are called 'lovely' or 'blessed' because, *"I am the one who is speaking, 'Here I am.'"* The One who is speaking through those whose feet bear the good tidings, is not the earthen vessel on that mount, but the One who possesses that life, and is speaking through it. It is actually Christ's own word. They hear the voice of God, and His word is as creative as it was in the beginning—He spoke and it was.

They are *our* feet—the lowliest part of our body; but the voice, the speaking, the content and the words that constitute the creative event, and that establishes faith to believe, so that those who had been hostile and resistant can call, is actually His voice, His speaking and His words. We might believe it through some giants of the faith like Paul, but can we believe the phenomenon through ourselves? Can we believe that God would have so much the possession of us, who are the sons and daughters of resurrection, that we might say with absolute certitude, "It is not we that speak."? The whole consummation of the age waits upon the restoration of a remnant from the people Israel, so historically and adamantly opposed to this very gospel, and who are the enemies of this gospel to this day. How shall they believe what they have so long rejected? God says, through Paul, that they shall hear a word of a particular kind.

Unless they hear *Him*, Christ's message and voice, they will not believe the truth of His death and resurrection. If you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, and God has raised

Him from the dead, you shall be saved. How shall they believe on Him unless they believe that He was raised from the dead? How shall they believe that He was raised from the dead except that the evidence of the resurrection is in the words, the demeanor, the voice, the disposition and the constitution of the person who stands before them? The hearer cannot believe unless we show forth as children of the resurrection the truth of the resurrection, and whose words are resurrection words of creative power. That is the issue of the salvation of the unsaved, and particularly of the Jew in the Last Days. It is *ourselves* and what we present to them that is the issue of their salvation.

Resurrection Life

The issue of the resurrection is the issue of the authenticity of Jesus' Lordship.

> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself to becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed upon Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:8–11)

The resurrection of Jesus is the exaltation of the One who experienced an ultimate humiliation unto death. His Lordship is His being exalted above every name, and that is what is conferred upon Him, through His resurrection, for His obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross. That is why whosoever shall believe that Jesus is Lord, and that God has raised Him from the dead, shall be saved. Those are the two principal doctrines, and they are inextricably joined together. If there was no resurrection, there is no Lordship.

In seeing, therefore, the resurrection of Christ, and hearing the voice of the resurrected Christ in the messenger, the unbeliever, who has had no preparation for this encounter, is faced with the end of *his* lordship over *his* own life. It is the end of his bank account, his business mergers, and of what he is going to do—all that is finished. All of that pseudo stuff is ended when Jesus becomes Lord and says, "Now you'll do My bidding." The reason people balk at God, who would otherwise enjoy God as God, is because they do not like the 'Lord' part. It is the lordship that catches us in the throat, and especially my Jewish people, because they like to be their own lords. To acknowledge that Jesus is Lord requires the power that raised Him from the dead.

To hear and see, therefore, a messenger, who speaks Christ's words, is to give evidence that Christ is resurrected, for the messenger himself is the son of the resurrection, or he is not a messenger, which is to say, he is not yet authentically God's. The Body out of which he comes must be a Body of a resurrected people, who live in the power and the reality of resurrection, or there is no sending that constitutes a 'sent' one. The whole issue

is the truth of resurrection as it is experientially known by a people in the earth, or both Jew and Gentile remain locked in their unbelief. Nothing else will free them.

To believe the resurrection is to believe that Jesus is Lord. To believe that Jesus is Lord is to believe the resurrection. To believe *at all* is a miracle that takes place by the operation of God through the speaking and hearing of one who is sent, who brings the glad tidings, that those who hear it might believe, and call upon the name of the Lord. That is more than just giving Him a little honorific acknowledgment, but the surrender of the independent life to the totality of God's authority once and for all. That is salvation, and anything less and other than that is false.

Why does God bless the feet of those who bring good news, and whose word actually constitutes peace and establishes salvation, and who says to Zion, "Your God reigns"? It is because the one who is saying it is the one in whom God *in fact* reigns. Though the one who is hearing him does not know the particular circumstances, the truth of the lordship in the man who is speaking is evident. There is a God who reigns, and the truth of His reigning as Lord is demonstrated in the posture, the voice, the face, the demeanor and the character of the one who brings the glad tidings. And so, the messenger is everything.

God puts a great premium on the voice of His spokesmen, because the voice carries the urgency of God, the divine seriousness, and if you change that and yet retain the technical word, you have lost the message. That is why Jesus could say that if they receive you, they receive Me, and if they receive Me, they receive Him who sends Me. We are the vital linkage with the living God, but we have got to be something more than well-meaning, evangelical Christians or charismatic cream puffs. We have got to be a piece of the resurrection ourselves.

God will not give His glory to another or share it with flesh, but only when it is exclusively Himself, and that is why we do not see *that* glory. There are not many of us who are willing to live on that razor's edge. We are not so much concerned with the glory of God as avoiding the embarrassment of failure, and that is what we see every Sunday from the pulpit. That is why we have so little 'resurrection event' in that preaching. That is why the apostolic preaching is different from conventional preaching. Conventional preaching can never be an event in God. It does not raise the dead. As someone has said, and I believe it out of my own experience, every true preaching is a raising again of the dead. We need to have an enhanced appreciation for what resurrection means as 'God event' in the word that is spoken in resurrection power. We will never be a mouth for that if there is anything we are trying to preserve that has to do with *our* reputation. In our fear, we reason, "What if the word fails? What if, having trusted God absolutely, and not leaned on our own resources, He does not come through? What if we are left with our face sticking out, and instead of a powerful resurrection word, there is just a little beep, and it falls to the ground with a thud? Then what?"—and that is why we do not see the glory of God.

The only one qualified to preach a word like that is the one who wants to run the other way, like Jonah. The man, however, who loves to talk, loves to be public, and enjoys

being seen and heard, need not think that a word like this will ever be emitted from his mouth. The man who sighs and groans when called upon to speak, who does not want to be there, who feels terribly uncomfortable, who knows that he is not going to be understood, is the man out of whose mouth the word of true preaching is most likely to come.

An Elijah People

God is actually after an entire apostolic church that can command the elements just like Elijah, *"There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."* Imagine a mere man commanding the elements with the authority of God Himself! This is not a privilege to be allowed a man who is still jerked around by his own subjectivity. When God will allow such speaking through a mortal mouth, you can be sure that the vessel has been adequately dealt with at the hand of God in such a way that you cannot tell where the man ends and God begins. His thought *is* God's thought, and his word *is* God's word. And God is wanting a people in the earth, who have this deep reverence for the spoken word.

I gave a message many years ago at a conference in Washington, DC. I was a young believer then, who had barely gone beyond the giving of my own testimony. I fasted and waited upon God for two days for the message. In the simplicity and naiveté that I had as a young believer, I simply spoke the words that God gave. The organizers thought that I was going to give a nice Jewish testimony, but the Lord gave me a message entitled, *Eunuch for Christ's Sake*, and I myself was too young to realize how radical this message was. The sword of the Lord went into hundreds of people, and split them into two groups. One half were ready to hang on my neck with gratitude for the word that for them was very life, and the rest were ready to *take* my life.

I was astonished by the effect, and I knew that something very deep had happened. It was the final day of the conference, and that night all of the speakers and their wives were invited to the penthouse apartment of the president of the organization. That was the night I learned what it meant to be a stranger and a pilgrim. When we came to the buffet table, men turned their shoulders, and I felt like the offscouring of the world, like some misfit who had brought such a terrible word of offense, and caused this painful controversy.

The moment, however, I finished speaking the message that night, a man came up to me, telling me he was a Jewish prophet, sent of God, and an officer of the hosting organization. He said that he had a word for me from the Lord, and that I had missed the mind of the Lord, and had done grievous damage to God's people. He told me that I needed immediately to go back to the microphone, and recant the message. Do you know how I felt when I heard that? If I had a choice, I would have preferred to have been physically stabbed than to receive the standing accusation that came forth. The first thoughts that came to me were that it could be true, and that maybe I *had* missed the

mind of the Lord, even after waiting on the Lord and fasting. And then, how about the past? What about the other things that I had spoken? Could I have been wrong in them? What assurance had I for the future?

It was a devastating accusation, and the Lord was not there to grant me any relief. I went into self-imposed exile for a time, and eventually left the country and moved to Denmark, my wife's country, a land where I could not understand a word they were speaking. ,My children had to take me by my hand to interpret for me as if I was an imbecile. It was a 'wilderness' experience for a man who was jealous of words and their meaning. I refused all invitations, never again desiring to go up on the platform, and the Devil used this opportunity to ride me relentlessly, "Whoever said you were a preacher? You never should have gone beyond your testimony. You should have remained a High School teacher. Whoever said you were called? Look at all the damage you have done! You thought you had the mind of the Lord, you egotist!" And I would say right after those thoughts, "Yes, that is right."

For six months, I groaned in that condition, burning with the unspeakable shame that this "prophet" might be right, and he was calling me long distance to remind me to recant. It was a trial by fire in the silence of God. After six months, I was invited to speak, and having a release from the Lord, I began to prepare myself by reading from Watchman Nee's trilogy on *The Spiritual Man.* To my utter astonishment there was a reference to the "Eunuch for Christ's sake"! He used the very same Scriptures that I had used in my own speaking, and then he added, that if we missed the Spirit's meaning and considered it only 'carnally,' we would be profoundly offended! When I read that, a great release came, a lifting of the burden, and a deep vindication from God that I had indeed spoken His word.

I am describing this episode for one reason only, namely, that if the word of God is going to be restored to its exalted status as a word that is given to us as event, we need to be reminded that the price will not be cheap. There is a cost for this kind of word, and periodically God will require it just to remind us how holy a thing it is to speak the word He gives.

Proclaiming the Word that is 'Given'

"The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet." What does it take to hold something and not to express it, however true and however much we think it will serve the purposes of God, and bless people in the hearing? If it is not God's moment, then we need to hold it. Why is God like that? If He gave it, and does not want it expressed now, then why does He not give it later when it is time to be expressed? Why give it now merely to be held? Does not God know that that is going to be a frustration and an inward kind of discipline of a very demanding kind? Yes, of course He knows it, and that is exactly why He is doing it! Something happens to the individual when he contains and holds his own spirit, and does not just spit it out. An ejaculation is always a great relief, but to hold it

until the appointed time is *beyond* the issue of what relieves *us*. It is the issue of what glorifies *God*. There is still a 'you' involved when we blurt out something. To come to a place where there is no self interest or satisfaction, and it is all the same to speak or not to speak, to be seen or not to be seen, to be used or not to be used, to be set aside or to be employed—*then we can be used*.

God's purpose is not the alleviation of our tension, but the revelation of His glory. We tend to be more alleviation-minded than glory-minded, and so long as we remain in that condition, we will never be used to minister the Life of God. We have a question, and so we *expect* an answer. The question may even be good and interesting, so why not ask it and get an answer! We have a need and we *want* it met, but that is not being ruled by the Spirit of God, only self-interest. Everything is predicated on *our* interest. The fact that it is a spiritual interest does not void it from being self-interest. We are not to operate by our own curiosity, and though something is good or valid, that does not justify expressing it. The only issue is what God gives in that moment.

We are not to proceed by our own seeing, our own hearing, our own subjectivity or our own impressions. We are the Lord's, and our life is not our own. We have no life until God gives it, and God gives it for *His* purpose and glory *only*. Even when we see those who are being addressed falling like flies, and going down on their faces under the power and impact of that word, we experience absolutely nothing in that moment. We are absolutely impervious, and totally unaffected by what has brought others down on their faces. We are simply 'out of it,' because it is not our word. We cannot exalt in it, because it is not our work. It is the strangest of feelings to be somehow detached from the power and effect of your own word, nor are we allowed in any way even to draw forth any satisfaction for ourselves.

When we speak on *that* basis, we are challenging everything to which men have given their endorsement. Either our word is God's, or we are some wild freak who is doing damage to the Body of Christ. That tension is with us always, and the Lord will even allow an occasion here and there where it will *not* be Him, and we have acted in a way in which we *thought* it was the Lord, but it was out of our own savvy. God wants merely to keep us honest, and we must not presume that on every occasion we can be confident that it is God, as that will remove the tension and dependency. God will allow a humiliation and a failure, all the more to charge our hearts anew with the enormous gravity of what we are about, and the requirement to be cleaving to Him, and dependent upon Him, for our every word.

There are situations where we are not sure what to say, or what to do. It is a remarkable kind of suffering to be in that kind of predicament, and then even after the moment passes, we are still assaulted by the thought of perhaps having missed the moment, when we should have done something, and we did not. That is a suffering, but I want to say that that suffering is at the heart of church life. There is a suffering that remains to be filled up in the Body. This kind of suffering is inevitable, frequent, and we need to learn to bear it. Many of us have agonized over the condition of the church, and the Lord knows it, and there is a certain inevitability about it, a certain tension of *not knowing*. We will always

wonder if we did rightly, and in bearing that suffering, the Lord will honor our part. When the redemptive answer comes, it will come out of the willingness to bear the suffering as being part of the faith.

Our Preaching Mandate

We need to repent of the casual way we have been speaking up until now. We must stop the shallow abuse and misuse of the word of God and 'playing' with the Scriptures as if they were God's provision for us to perform a sermon. Paul did not say to Timothy, *"Sermonize!"* but, *"Preach the word! Be instant in season and out of season. Reprove and rebuke with all long-suffering."* Here is our mandate! This should be the essential substance of all our preaching. The purpose of preaching is not to construct interesting sermons, or to enjoy the word of God, as if we are spiritual sensualists. The word of God is given for practical purposes, namely, to reprove, to rebuke, and to exhort, but how many of our congregations can even accept this most elementary thing? They are coming for something else on Sunday. They want to be 'comforted,' or hear a calming word. After all, they say, they have had a heavy week. Can you see that the whole construct of our church, and its whole mentality is warped?

> "I charge you before God," Paul says, "and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge … preach the word."

In other words, sermons, though they may well be doctrinally sound, will have the effect of dulling the audience. It is this that makes one a professional performer. If we are going to have an apostolic word, a creative word that works a work in those that hear it, then it is going to come through men and women who are not ruled by the fear of man. God seeks those who will wait for His word, and who will not find it in their concordances. There is a place where God bids us come to commune with Him—within the veil, in the holiest place of all, between the cherubim and above the Ark of the Covenant. He is a real God with a real purpose for mankind, and He says,

> "I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."

This is why Paul could say to his listeners:

> And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:19–20)

If Paul had to plead for such prayer for himself, a man who had an encyclopedic knowledge of apostolic things, and who had been a student under the Rabbi Gamaliel,

then how much more must we discard any casual approach to the ministry of God's word! Paul would not dream of fashioning his own words.

The Voice of the Preacher

There should be the resonance of God in our speaking, conveying not only the content and the meaning, but also the disposition of God's own heart, and how *He* feels about what is being said. I often pray, "Lord, so possess me that Your word will have full expression, even the mood of the speaking." The mood has nothing to do with the preacher's choosing. There are times when he is like a piece of cardboard, or a straight monotone, and he cannot alter it. He is uncomfortable speaking like that, and wishes he had the liberty to give the word the flourish that it needs. He is, however, as much bound in God in the manner of the speaking as the content of the speaking. Other times the same man is beside himself, unable to be contained, falling off the edge of the platform in the intensity of the moment. In both cases, it is not the man who makes that determination, but *God*.

There is something about the resonance of a voice that bespeaks the history and the quality of the person's relationship with God. I know that our voices are as distinctive as our personalities and our appearances, but all of these things are tempered by our relationship with God. When I look at certain faces, I know that they do not reveal the grace of God, nor do they reveal the evidence of a relationship of a continuing or deep kind. There is something lacking in the face. In other faces, however, they are not even conscious of a radiance emanating from themselves. When you are in God's presence, and are a seeker after God, and there is a life of communion, devotion and pouring your heart out, then the reflection of that will be both in the face and voice of the believer. A voice is like a signature, and someone said that by the time we are forty years old, we are responsible for the lines and expressions on our faces. We are also responsible for our voices, and God held Israel responsible for failing both to heed His words and the *voice* of His speaking as it came to them through the prophets.

The Mood of the Speaking

A preacher's mood may often be in violent opposition to the mood that has already been established in the congregation, especially by the 'worship team.' Worship teams and leaders often seem to have an independent purpose for their being, attempting to establish some kind of mood. Instead of working in conjunction *with* the word that is to come, or sensing the mood and heart of God, they have already got their choruses numbered, and what they are going to sing and do. They have their musical talent and amplifiers, and they are going to 'do their thing,' and leave you to make the best of it as well as you can. Worship ministry, then, becomes celebrated as a thing in itself. If I could, I would pull the plug out of every overhead projector and amplifier. Let us rather just splutter and

choke along, and miss a word here and there, and come into the spirit of God's worship, than that we should be led with choruses and more choruses. What they are really trying to do is to effect an atmosphere for a service, rather than touch the heart of God, let alone prepare for the receiving of a holy word for those assembled.

There is a struggle going on right within the church, and no man feels it more acutely than the 'freak' who is bearing a strange word with a mood contrary to that which prevails, where everybody wants to go home feeling good, and nobody wants to go home in tension. An apostolically-minded preacher will often send people home jarred and unhappy, with many unanswered questions. He has not that mentality that wants everything to be wrapped up in one package with a ribbon on it, in one service, and send people home happy. He will let the people go home jarred, pained, and even agonizing. He will raise questions that will induce his listeners to wrestle and fight their way through to a place in God. There are very few pastors, maybe one in a hundred, who would be willing to allow his congregation to suffer that kind of stress and tension. "Send them home happy" is the unspoken premise of contemporary religion to which we, who have the apostolic mindset, do not subscribe. We are of a kind to send them home agitated with questions they are compelled to consider and that cannot be answered in one service. If we were given three days, we might be able to bring the listeners all the way through. How many churches, however, are willing to submit to such a man for that length of time? One service at best and, *"Get him away!"*

My suspicions are alerted if there is any 'bombast' or 'hype,' any exaggeration or sensationalism that conjures up a manner or a mode of excitement that the ear loves to hear, that would draw out those who are bored and want some kind of alternative to their boredom. We do not have to bring to the word an additional quality so as to make it compelling to the hearer. The word itself speaks for itself. Anyone who would seek to bring an extraneous element through his own personality or manner of speaking is likely false. If we are highly individualistic, and want to cut a swath for ourselves, or do our own thing in our own way, then we are disqualified. "*I* will put *My* word in your mouth, and that is what you will speak, and you will speak it in the manner that *I* want it spoken." This is not a surrender of identity, but an *establishing* of it. The man in God may loses his life, but actually he has found it. God does not call us to be automatons, who bear the word of God as a mechanical contrivance. They are formed even from the womb, and that forming is at the hand of *God*.

Come Up and Be There!

Are we secure enough in God that we have nothing to prove, nothing to demonstrate, because our identity is so established in God? Are we so accepted in the Beloved that we do not have to prove anything for *our* ministry or for ourselves? We do not have to exhibit our intelligence, our spirituality, our experience, but rather we wait for the word that is given. If Jesus would not so much as speak His own words, what then shall we presume to speak? Indeed, it is humbling to wait for that which is *given,* especially when

you are naturally clever in yourself, and even have a flair with words. To be utterly dependent upon God, for that which is given, is a humiliation for man in his pride.

We must never be satisfied with a mere ‘good thing.’ God invites us to an apostolic jealousy for a word that is *given* in communion with Him. Moses received his instruction at the top of the Mount of God, where he spent forty days and forty nights neither eating nor drinking. He came up into the presence of God that he might receive the tablets of the Law, and right from the very first invitation, we see the whole genius of God with man: *"Come up unto Me, and be there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the Law and the commandments which I have written that you may teach them,"* God says, to all with any fleshly ambition, "and do not think that you are just going to come up and grab them from Me and go. I know your craven religious ambition to establish your preaching reputation, but I am a holy God, and you are not going to be preaching some abstract thing from My Word."

The first requirement of apostolic preaching is ever and always this: "Come up *unto* Me, not for what you are going to receive from Me, but *unto* Me, for My own sake, and *be* there in totality, all that you are in union with all that I am, and *then* I will give you the tablets of the Law."

This is the requirement of God, and yet the majority of us seem to feel that we have the liberty to violate His Word, and to extract Scriptures and to ‘make’ sermons. God is calling us to a higher thing, through the restoration of apostolic reality and glory, by men and women who do not take their liberty with the Scriptures, but receive from God the explicit word that is given in only one place—His presence! *"Come up unto Me, and be there"* is in itself the apostolic message. What the world is dying for is not information *about* God, but men and women who will communicate God as He is in *Himself*. This is the only thing that shall save us from becoming mere technicians, and from being the victims of yet another religious phraseology. The world needs the knowledge of a God that is exuded by men and women who speak to them out of the presence of God. The world does not know how to live, and that is why it chases after its drugs, eroticism, and sensuality. They have no idea of what it means to *be there*. They need to see apostolic reality in those who will teach them how to live, and how to *be there* in totality, and to enjoy the depths of fellowship with both God and their fellow man. To ‘come up’ is not an easy coming, and indeed, no ‘going up’ is ever an easy going, yet it is the only place of true communion.

We must speak the word of God in the sight and presence of God at all times. It requires an apostolic consciousness and coming to a deep revelation of the sacrament of the spoken word. Paul says that we shall be held accountable for everything we have done in our bodies, both good and bad, including our speaking. In 2 Corinthians 3:4–5 he says:

> And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.

To have a reliance and confidence toward God are not something that is based on our own ability—as if anything could come from us that could accomplish the work of God—but that all of our power, ability and sufficiency are from God. *"For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To whom be the glory forever!"*

We must have a reliance and confidence *through* Christ, and we must know that we are not qualified within ourselves, and indeed, we must know what a piece of foolishness we are in ourselves! If we are speaking His word, we do not have to buttress it with our own natural personality. It does not require our charm to make it succeed, for He gives the Spirit without measure to those who bear His word. We need desperately to come to an apostolic place, that we might be permanently ruined, and never go back to anything less. We should insist on *His* word and His word only from this time forth, for He is quite able and willing to give it if we will come up unto Him and *be* there. It is He who has qualified us, and made us fit to be worthy and sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant!

Oh, for such apostolic men again as Paul! Men who will speak the creative word into the very foundations of the church of Jesus Christ, words that are given in commandment out of the presence of God by men and women, who will come up to Him and be there! Are you determining something in your heart, namely, that this word may be an event for you because it comes to you as more than a word of instruction? That it comes to you as a call and challenge, and as an invitation and command to, "Come up unto Me"? Up from the fear of men, up from the concern for your petty reputation, up from the emphasis of the traditions of men, and the kinds of things they want to hear? I pray that this is coming to you as a personal word, an apostolic invitation and command from God to be a minister of His uncompromised word, both in the church of Jesus Christ, and to the world. God will thresh you in sever dealings in order to bring you to a place where you recognize in your deepest innermost being the irreverence that many of us have for the word that is given. He will be with us in our affliction, but He will not alleviate it. He wants us to feel the full brunt of what it means to be a man through whose mouth either life or death can come. This is not preaching to entertain, but a serious bearing of the word of the Lord. The responsibility is enormous, and we need to know the consequence of it. But when it is spoken, in the moment that it is given of God, then it is life for the dead!

Where that boldness or authority is not expressed, then the sermon stands in jeopardy of becoming mere ceremony, an adjunct, a piece of familiar and unchallenging predictability. It requires nothing from its hearers and it makes no demand, but only fills the space that has been made for it, and there is no glory in the church. The word has not come to us as event, and to that measure, we are incapacitated as God’s agents in the world and constitute only a sleepy, Sunday religious culture that the world can well afford to ignore. The faith is holy, and we cannot live, transact, and operate at other levels, and think that it is without consequence of one kind or another. As nature abhors a vacuum, the space that should have been filled with godly content and the Holy Spirit, now invites murky and dubious substitutes only too eager to provide themselves.

Authority is relative to the knowledge of God in intimate communion, or it is not authority, and it is this that distinguishes false preaching from the true. Our ability to discern the one from the other is relative to our *own* communion with God. In the last analysis, the world is dying for the lack of the communication of very God Himself. This knowledge, and this sense of God, are not only the apostolic message, but also the foundation of the church, and all reality itself.

Chapter 5 - Apostolic Confrontation: Paul on Mar's Hill (the Aeropagus)

Paul on Mars Hill is the sacred man confronting the secular; the spiritual mind verses the worldly mind; the heavenly perspective brought to bear toward that which is earthly. It is an ultimate, classic, and eternal confrontation, and therefore every element in this text, and everything that the Spirit of God is expressing through Paul to men, is not only powerfully pertinent in *that* express moment, but it continues to reverberate throughout all time and history, and even to this hour. It actually might be said that it is more pungent and significant *now* at the conclusion of time and history, than it was two thousand years ago when Paul spoke it. The elements are the same, because nothing has changed.

> But when the Jews of Thessalonica found out that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also, they came there likewise, agitating and stirring up the crowds. And then immediately the brethren sent Paul out to go as far as the sea; and Silas and Timothy remained there. Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. (Acts 17:13–15)

When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. The men, who escorted Paul, brought him to Athens, and then left with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible (Acts 17:13–15). And so, Paul was fleeing from persecution, and while he was waiting for his colleagues to catch up with him, the Spirit of God set something in motion in his spirit. This is a pure, apostolic episode and revelation of the apostolic man, all the more beautiful and profound because it was unexpected. It was not sought for, or humanly arranged, but totally ordered of by God.

The Inception of Paul’s Message

> Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols (v 16).

We need to understand that this incident is as much in the intention of God as were all of the other places where Paul found himself. It was all the same to Paul whether he went because he saw a vision of a Macedonian beseeching him, or he goes circumstantially in flight, or even when being taken somewhere by other men. For such a man with such a mentality, and such an apostolic consciousness and perception, *nothing* is by chance. Everything is in the ordination of a Sovereign God, who attends to every detail. If God has not one means to get his man to the explicit and appointed place, then He has yet

another. Nothing is therefore accident; nothing is wasted; nothing is out of its time. That needs to be *our* consciousness also. We need to have that abiding sense of the sovereignty of God, and if we miss a plane, or some untoward thing takes place, we are not to be chafed in our spirits, or murmur under our breath, but to rejoice for the inadvertent thing that God will turn to His glory. We need to put on another mindset, and not see ourselves as victims of circumstance, even when it is ungainly or unpleasant. It was not pleasant for Paul to be in flight from persecution, and yet it is the very thing that God employed to bring His apostolic man to the appointed place and in the appointed time. Paul never lifted a finger in his own behalf, or in the promotion of his own ministry—the way *we* would—and yet God had him in the right place at the right time.

Paul's spirit was grieved and provoked within him as he saw the city wholly given to idolatry, and right here we have the point of inception of an apostolic event. That which is apostolic is eminently of the Spirit. It begins in the Spirit, conducted in the Spirit, and performed in the power of the Spirit, but it is in a man who sees and who grieves.

> Now while he was waiting … he was beholding …

This is a man with his eyes open. He was a true worshipper of God, and that qualified him to discern the things that are false. He was not some hyper-spiritual type that kept himself aloof from the world. He saw right through the pretensions of men, because he was a man who was very much in the world, and even quotes their poets. Paul knew the world and how it thought, and he confronted it in the power of God by words that the Lord gave in the moment.

Many of us could have been in the same place, and we would have been entirely unmoved. It is not because the Spirit has ceased grieving, but because we do not have, to our shame, Paul's proximity to the Spirit. Our eyes are not beholding as God beholds, and therefore we would miss it completely. There is a pattern here that must be at the inception of *every* apostolic and authentic act, namely, the stirring of the Spirit in a soul that can be grieved in what he beholds with his eyes. This issue of true perception, and seeing as God sees, and seeing through outward appearances, is so imperative for the things that are apostolic.

The Essence of Idolatry

The idolatry that is present with our generation is exactly the same as the idolatry of Paul's day. Idolatry is not something that only has to do with pagan altars and shrines. We need to understand, in essence, what the whole idolatrous thing is that permeates the spirit of our age, and has been with us since the Fall of man. This was Athens, the seat of humanism and everything that the world continues to celebrate. Every present-day philosophy and mindset has a direct linkage to the philosophies of that day. Nothing has changed, except the titles—Epicureanism and Stoicism may be defunct topically speaking as philosophies, but the substance of them, what they are about, the mind-set,

the self-servingness of these philosophies as alternatives to true relationship to God, still exist. Athens was a place of ultimate prominence in the civilization and glory that was Greece. Athens was known for its love of worldly wisdom, but it was a wisdom that does not make place for the true God.

> So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. (v 17)

Why does it say that Paul immediately went and disputed with the Jews in the synagogue? He was moved by idolatry, and it says that he *therefore* confronted the Jews in the synagogue. What has that got to do with a city that is wholly given over to idolatry? How do you go from idolatry on one hand to disputing with the Jews in the synagogue? Well, the synagogue is the place where idolatry is *most rampant* with idolatrous substitution for the true worship of God. We might just as well add the synagogues of the Gentiles, or any religious establishment that offers to man a religion of convenience, and that requires nothing in terms of true relationship, or service to the Most High God.

Idolatry is anything that gives man a modicum of psychic and emotional satisfaction, and that produces something ethereal through the combination of organs and stained glass windows, or whatever the modern equivalent is. It lets them feel that they have done their 'Sunday thing,' and they are now free for the golf course or the football game. That is idolatry in its very heart, and it is *powerful*. It is any religious substitute for the truth, the reality and the requirement of God. Idols do not require anything from their worshippers, but the Living God does*: "Take up your cross and follow Me."* An idol is dumb, satisfying the religious needs of men, and absolves them of the requirements of God. Even 'church attendance' can give men a sense of religious satisfaction, and save them from the radical requirement of God. It is idolatry by whatever name it is called wherever it is practiced—in the marketplace, the synagogue, or the church.

To have an apostolic heart is to have a heart that continually pounds with a jealousy for the glory of God, and cannot stand to see something that competes for the attention of men, that calls itself worship and is not. If we do not think that this kind of idolatry can even be practiced invoking the name of Jesus, then we are naive indeed. We need to see apostolically, if we are going to be employed apostolically. If Paul had not been grieved, or provoked in his spirit, there would not have been the event that followed. Paul's grief had its source in his jealousy for the love of God, the knowledge of Him, and because he knew that those, who have been seduced by an idolatrous substitute, are doomed eternally. Paul cannot *stand* it, and when God finds such a man, then you can be sure that that man will be brought to the place of confrontation.

> And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and

> brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean." (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) (vv 18–21)

Ultimate Confrontation

"Spending their time doing nothing" is not only a statement of the philosophers of that generation, but also right here and now. Men are still seeking after truth, but never come to the knowledge of it. It is a phony posture that celebrates and exalts man. They *presume* to be seekers after truth, but never come to the knowledge of the truth. They are always in the process of seeking, and while they are yet seeking, they are fornicating and indulging themselves, never coming to the truth, but always with a self-satisfying posture that wants to hear some new thing. Do we see the desolate condition of mankind, the misspent hours, the waste, the meaninglessness of almost all of human existence in the way it perpetuates its life? Are our hearts stirred and grieved at the condition of men in the world without God? In contrast, Paul's moments were filled with eternal consequence, and what a difference!

Paul could not have asked for a more supreme opportunity to bring the message of God to men, not just any men, but men in the ultimate place of a human civilization that celebrated itself above God. Paul was the pitiful, Hebrew, itinerant servant, without credentials, or any authority that Greek philosophers would in any way respect or understand. They called him a 'babbler,' and looked upon him with complete contempt, because he was the antithesis of all that was respected and celebrated by Greek civilization. And yet they were curious, and gave him an opportunity to speak. And, therefore, whatever Paul was to say, in that place, and in that time, is eternally significant. It was born of the necessity of the moment, which in fact is the very genius of apostolic speaking. It is a revelation of what apostolic is, namely, the man is the thing in himself. Paul is the genius of what God is about, and that is why Paul is the foundation of the church. To meet an apostolic man, or to hear from a true apostle, is to be held *eternally* accountable. Those Athenians came as close to God as is possible on the earth, because it was the very High Priest and Apostle of our confession who was being expressed *through* Paul. God cannot do more for men than to put before them the apostolic testimony, and it has got to come through the flesh and blood vessel. We need to have a reverence for apostolic things, and a deep sense of what it takes for such a thing to be wrought in the earth by God in and through man.

So what does a man say when he has to stand before pagans, whose philosophy, mindset, and whole civilization are a direct offense against God? What one thing could he say to them for which they would be eternally responsible? That is what the message of Paul on Mars Hill is. It is interesting and ironic that the message did not result in revival. It did not create the church of Athens as was created, for example, in Ephesus or Corinth. There

were two or three who are mentioned by name, who cleaved to Paul and believed. Why therefore does this find a prominent place in the New Testament? The word that he gave went far beyond Athens, but the fact that it took place in Athens is significant. Athens was not just the capital of Greece, in a sense, it was the capital of the whole world at that time.

We need also to understand what it means to stand in the midst of these philosophers at Mars Hill. Paul was facing everything that opposed the wisdom of God. These men whom he faced were every bit as much a representative of the kingdom of darkness and the powers of the air as, for example, a sorcerer is. They may have been clothed with philosophical garb, and spoke another kind of language that does not seem to be as alarming, yet in its nature, they were every bit as antithetical and opposed to the Kingdom of God, and the purposes of God, as witchcraft. Paul was meeting something head on, a certain spirit that prevails in the world today—especially in the religious world. When God confronts it, He is going to confront it apostolically, which is to say, *foolishly*!

> And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious (‘superstitious’—King James Version) in all respects. (v 22)

What a mocking statement! If you want to get an intellectual, philosophical type mad, tell him that he is *superstitious*. What an indignity! They pride themselves in being *above* superstition, and so, by beginning with an insult, Paul is *already* needling them. He was a man who spoke what God gave him, nor had he any concern for the consequences of that speaking as it pertained to himself. *That* is apostolic, but if we are fearful, and walking and speaking in a guarded way, and calculating what we shall say so as not to offend, or be misunderstood, then how shall we be a mouth for God in confrontation with a hostile world? There is only One who can determine what is appropriate in any given moment, namely, the Lord Himself.

> For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘to an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. (v 23)

We will never be able to identify, or confront the thing that is false, unless we can also say with Paul, *"This I proclaim to you."* It is not enough to know *about* the truth; we need to be intensely and intimately *in* the Life of that truth before we dare expose the lie. Paul’s statement may sound arrogant, but it is his very boldness and incisiveness that are themselves a demonstration of the God whom Paul was proclaiming. Paul taunted them with their superstitious, play-acting charade about the ‘Unknown God,’ as if somehow it shows a respect and reverence, when really it was a phony deceit.

Those Athenians may have worshipped their idols ignorantly, but we need to know that it was a *willful* ignorance. They *chose* to worship a god who is unknown, because an unknown god makes no requirement at all, and Paul saw right through it. The thing that

sounds at face value to be so spiritual—monuments with inscriptions to the Unknown God—is in fact a phony deference that saves men from any excruciating demand of being in relationship with the *God who is*. They *prefer* that He remains unknown, but Paul will not allow them that luxury. To know God as He is, is to have a serious intrusion into your life that changes *everything*.

That is why my Jewish kinsmen and their Rabbis love to speak about 'a higher power' and 'an impersonal force in the universe.' It sounds so spiritual, but will *we* congratulate them for that kind of spirituality, or will we see how deceitful such a statement is? There is something in the human heart, not just the Jewish heart, which likes to keep God at a *great* distance. The human heart *wants* an impersonal God, because an impersonal God does not say, *"Thou shall not commit adultery. Thou shall love the Lord Thy God with all your heart."* We need to see through the deception of the human heart, and Paul was always conscious that this was an eternal moment to whereby he could not spare them. His love was too great to flatter them, and so He let them have it right in the face, because the truth is painful *before* it is glorious. True comfort comes *after* we have been discomforted.

God as Creator and Lord

He then begins his remarkable statement—a whole basis for understanding God in relationship to individuals, but equally to the nations as distinct entities in themselves. And so Paul begins with God as Creator:

> The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; (v 24)

This statement could not be more fundamental. Everything rests upon God as Creator. The earth is the *Lord's*, and therefore He has a right over His own creation. He is not just the Creator of heaven and earth, He is the *Lord* of heaven and earth. If we do not have a perception of God as Creator, we have no foundation for truth or reality. For Paul, to begin here with God as Creator, was not an accident, but a divine revelation of the foundational premise upon which everything rests: *"In the beginning God created …"*

Since He is Lord of heaven and earth, what then is the implication for the piece of earth called Athens? He is the *Lord* also of Athens. Paul did not say it, but it is implicit in what he is saying. He was giving more than just correct views; it was in his spirit and life, because the Creator of Paul was also his Lord. When Paul used the word 'Lord,' it would have gone into the hearts of those men like a dagger. To evoke the word 'Lord' can only have power and penetration to the degree that it is true for us who speak it. Paul was directly and totally under the authority of the One whom he called Lord, and the evidence was in his very speaking. If the Lord were not Lord, he would not have begun with an insult. Paul would have begun with a compliment the way most of us would, because our speaking is, for the most part, what *we* determine, not what *He* determines.

This is a beautiful portrait of what the word ‘apostolic’ means. It is all the more perfect because it is not self-conscious. The moment it is self-conscious, it becomes religious, and however technically it might be true, it loses its power. God is putting something before those men in Athens that was beyond philosophy and religion. It was very God Himself, because that which is apostolic is authentic, and that which is authentic is apostolic. This is the genius and beauty of apostolic, and we need to pray, therefore, that God will again give such men to the church, for until He does, we are without foundation.

God the Giver

> Neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything,
> since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; (v 25)

Paul is speaking in the midst of the temples, more impressive *then* when they stood in their original, pristine beauty. They were powerful statements of human civilization. There is something about the visible evidence of this world that is intimidating, but Paul was representing another reality that would only be verified in the eternal future, yet would seem like absolute foolishness to those who were hearing him. Paul told them that there is a God who does not need things that men make with their hands, or their monuments, as if He needed anything.

Paul had a knowledge of a God who gives *all* things, including his imprisonment with Silas in Philippi, in the chapter before, where they were stripped naked and beaten within an inch of their lives. It was an absolutely forsaken place, miles from their friends, yet they were there in obedience. It says that at about midnight, the darkest hour, when you give up all hope and confidence, Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises unto God.

Times of adversity and affliction are among the ‘all things’ that come from the hand of God. Can we rejoice in them, and praise God in them, and say with conviction to the unbelievers of this world, that He is the God who gives *all* things? That is what makes an apostle’s word so penetrating. He has experienced the ‘all things,’ and received them as coming from God’s hand, and you do not have to understand ‘why.’ We can *say* that there is a God who gives all things, but it will not mean anything, or have penetration, or be a challenging and compelling statement, demanding the attention of men to that God, except that we really believe it, in the sense that we are living it, and it has been tempered into our experience.

If Paul had seen his Philippian imprisonment as some kind of an unhappy circumstance, he would not have found himself on Mars Hill speaking to Greek philosophers. God is waiting for men who believe that there is a God who gives *all* things. Have we really surrendered to the total sovereignty of God? The evidence of that is in the way we express our disappointment. We see men as being the problem, or circumstances, or we ourselves were at fault: "If only *we* had done this instead of that, then something might

have been changed." We do not recognize, however, that there is a Supreme God in the heavens, who gives all things. It is not an excuse for our indifference, or neglect, but we need to recognize that He is the God of all things. When we can rejoice in the sovereignty of God in the things that are painful, as well as the things that are pleasant, then we can stand before secular men and speak of the God who gives to all, life and breath. If He is the God of life, then is He not also the God of death? And if He is not the God of the one, then He is not the God of the other. If He is not God of all, then He is not God *at all*.

The Nations in Paul's Message

> And He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation. (v 26)

Paul is beginning to really focus in on the subject of nations. The nations are not geological accidents, but God's creation, and He has established them, and given them their boundaries. It implies that we are not to make our own boundaries. In fact, wars are about boundaries, territories and land. We do not want to be bound, because a boundary is a limitation, and we do not want to know a God who imposes and requires it. Paul is giving a cosmic view of creation and the nations, and of a God who has created them for *His* purpose. God does not establish boundaries and times for no reason, being a purposeful God, and He has an intention for the nations. Nations are not accidental entities, or something to be explained by anthropologists. Paul explains it in one statement: God has established the bounds of the nations. This is contrary to the freethinking of modern men; it is very restrictive, and gives no latitude for mankind to 'do his thing,' or to use this planet as if it was a toy or plaything for their purposes.

> That they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. (vv 27–29)

The Purpose of Man's Existence

Paul's statement does not even sound religious. He did not quote any Scripture, and in fact, it sounds philosophical and very much like Greek thought and teaching. Paul was saying that the whole of creation, the complex, manifold civilization and world, nations and races, the formation of men themselves, and their life on earth, was for one reason only: *"to seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him."* This is despite every appearance to the contrary. The history of the world, its outpoured blood, its

fortunes that have been dispensed, its technology, its architecture, and its institutions are only secondary things to provide sufficient stability and order for life, that men might seek after God. This view is so utterly narrow, and does not make room for anything else. It is a gush from Paul that in one short moment tells them what the whole purpose of human existence is.

Paul has reduced the whole of human existence to one pursuit only, namely, that the whole purpose of human life on this planet is for the purpose of finding God *before* we enter into eternity, either *God-less* or *with Him*. This is a view that has been dismissed in modern times, but needs to be restored. Paul believed it, but do *we* live as if we believe it? Our lives contradict our words, and if we do not live as if we believe something, then we need to understand that *we do not really believe it*.

The purpose of man's existence is not to seek his happiness, but to seek after God. In fact, the happiness that is to be found outside of God, and which the world is quick to provide as substitute, is delusion and deception. God is the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, but He has not established them that we could have a fun time, pursue our careers, promote our interests, build our civilizations, or any other thing—those are secondary things.

The message that we can live and move and exist in God is unwelcome to the ears of mankind. They do not *want* to know of such a possibility, because they *want* to live and move and have their being *in themselves*. They do not *want* to be bound by their habitations according to what God has determined or fixed for the purposes for which He has appointed them. Every single syllable that came from Paul's lips is a calculated offense to the sensibilities and mindset of man. They do not want to be restricted, and therefore they prefer to have their monuments to the "Unknown God."

When Paul said, *"… this I proclaim to you,"* he did not say, "There is a living God." Paul was saying, "This is His nature; this is His purpose; this is His requirement." It is a declaration of God that men do not want to hear, being unwelcome and abrasive. It not only is contrary to their opinion, it altogether contradicts the whole foundation of *all* their believing, and the whole structure of their thought and value system. Paul is contradicting an entire way of life, and makes it invalid. This is so different from the temper and way in which modern believers share their own faith; they offer it more as an opinion than as a conviction.

The Purpose of Nations

> "… That they should seek God …"

For a long time I thought that the 'they' referred exclusively to individuals, and in a sense that is true, but it would be more exegetically correct to see the 'they' as referring to the nations whose boundaries, habitations and times were established by God. Paul is

implying that the nations should seek God for the reason for which they were established. The failure to do so, and to have established their own purposes, without consulting God, is the very essence of what sin is. It is for this reason that God calls every man to repent, because He has chosen a day in which He will judge the world. It is a scandalous rejection of God by the world as nations, and God will judge it. That is Paul's message in Athens to the heart of nations, and therefore to all nations. Nations have an obligation toward God as nations, and that is what makes Paul's statement so profound in Athens, a city-state nation in itself, and living in complete disrespect and ignorance of the God who made it.

What is it the nations are to seek God for? It is to find out the purpose for which they have each been created as a nation, and the purpose for which their boundaries and habitations were given. The requirement of men and nations is to seek Him who is the Creator and Lord. It is a continual seeking, and because the *church* has been guilty of not seeking Him, we have no message for our nations. How much of *our* present church activity has been initiated out of ourselves, even for God's sake? We cannot blame the nations for not seeking God when many of us have not asked it for ourselves. Most of us live in complete disregard for the God who made us, and assume that whatever purposes we appoint, He must certainly approve. The great love that the church can demonstrate to their nations is to save them from the judgment of God by saying, "God has a controversy with you."

To find God is to find Him for the purpose for which we were intended. There is no finding of God, as God, nor is there any knowledge of God that is a true knowledge, independent of His revealed purpose. He is a purposeful God by very definition, or else He would not be God. To think that we have found God, and yet *not* to have found Him for His purpose, is not to have found God. Satan will let you think you have found God, and even give you a measure of certain subjective enjoyment and fulfillment, but the true discovery of God is the knowledge of God as the God who has purpose. And it is in the seeking of Him for that purpose that we come into the truth and depth of *real* relationship with God. To seek Him for the sense of His presence, which is characteristic of recent 'revival,' and not to seek Him for His purpose, is not to seek Him as He desires to be sought. Those who are merely satisfied with a measure of religion, without the power thereof, will not seek God. The true believer will seek God to find out and know the purpose for His creation. To purport to know God, and to be bereft of the knowledge of His purpose is not to know Him as God, and it betrays, and is evidence of the failure to have sought Him. The same principle applies to nations.

The Nations in Relation to Israel

God Himself has established the boundaries of the nations, and yet there is something about the nature of nation that inevitably encourages an idolatrous preoccupation to the point where it becomes very 'God.' Men worship nations, and will die for nations, and compete against nations, even in their sports. God made a provision to keep nations in

certain boundaries and relationships that would be sane and healthy for them, and yet allow Him to be the recognized Head over all. There is a place for legitimacy of nations, but only within a certain structure that God Himself provided. He has made *Israel* central to all the nations—for the law must go forth out of Zion—or there never will be a turning of swords into ploughshears. Israel is the pivot, and nations cannot be related, and recognize the boundaries and purposes of God, independent of their recognition of, and their submission to, the centrality of Israel for all nations.

> When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel. (Deuteronomy 32:8)

It is a statement in Scripture that no one ever sees or refers to, and yet it is the center of God's design for the nations. There will never be peace and justice in the world until it comes back to God's intention as at the first.

> Thus says the Lord God, 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her.' (Ezekiel 5:5)

This is not just the issue of God's strategy and design; it is the issue of God as God. That is why men oppose it. It is not just the way in which He wants real estate to be understood, but the way in which He wants *Himself* to be understood, by appointing what He appoints, and choosing what He chooses. Nations want to be autonomous so that they can choose their own course, and perform their own will, in the seeking of their *own* glory. The very existence of Israel in the world is a stubborn reminder of a God whose will they hate. To remove Israel is to remove God's righteous demand upon them. To blot Israel out from their sight, by the liquidation of that people, is one of the reasons why Jews have suffered near annihilation in all their history. They were not innocent victims though, for their own sinful conduct justified the wrath that has been poured out upon them. Both things are true at the same time. Nations ventilating their hatred against God, and the fury that comes upon Israel, are exactly Israel's deserving in proportion to their sins—not least being their failure to desire to be chosen, and to be for God what He has always intended.

The greatest drama of the Last Days (which is already in process) is the attempt to annihilate Israel *by the nations* so as to remove God's very provision for their relatedness to Him. That is why the *"nations rage and take thought against God and His Anointed and want to break their bands from them"* (Psalm 2). If you want to be freed from the requirement of God, as a nation, in the relationship of nations to God, then you must remove the nation Israel. That explains why the last drama in history, before the Lord's coming, is the attempt again to annihilate Israel, as well as the motive for it.

The Heart of Paul's Message

> Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (vv 30–31)

In that one statement, Paul abolishes every kind of other religion, and every kind of thing that purports to be truth, or to serve the purposes of men. He hones right in: Judgment—Resurrection—That man—a day. It was something specific, clear, unequivocal, uncompromising, sure, certain and absolute. That is apostolic love, and anything less would be a disservice to men. Can you imagine Paul telling someone to "accept Christ, and it will go well with you"? God *will* judge *all* men is a chilling totality. Whatever justification there might have been for your ignorance before, there is now no longer any excuse, because there is a people in the earth, who not only proclaim, but also demonstrate the reality of His resurrection.

God is patient, but there is a Day coming when His wrath, which has been mounting up, will be expressed. It is called the 'Day of the Lord,' and it will come against the nations of the world *after* He has dealt with Israel. He begins with the house of God, but no nation will be exempt from the fury of God poured out in wrath against all nations. That is why Paul is warning them in Athens. God has overlooked the times past, but now He is declaring to all men everywhere to repent, for He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by that Man whom He has raised from the dead. Jesus is not just King of the Jews, but God's Theocratic Ruler over His *entire* creation—and the nations. To Him every knee will bow, to the glory of God the Father.

I can just sense the chill that came into the spine of those who heard him. They had likely never before considered that God has appointed a day in which He will judge. There is nothing more appointed for foolishness than to bear the message of judgment, especially in a world that is completely without any sense of law and order, and 'doing its own thing' in what is right in its own sight. We can measure how deep we really are in God, and how much our own hearts have been affected by that truth, by our willingness to say it to another. It is an ultimate message, announced by Jesus at the commencement of his ministry,

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18–19)

He was reading from Isaiah chapter 61, but He did not complete the verse:

> "… and the day of vengeance of our God." (v 2)

He did not end with that verse, because it was not His task, but the final, end-time word that needs to be proclaimed, but this time by His Body, the church. The 'Day of the Lord' is at the door, and the elements shall burn with a fervent heat. We know it technically, but do we know it actually? Can we say it to Epicureans and Stoics with conviction? Paul knew God as Judge, and if *we* knew it to the same degree, we would not be so carnal in our behavior.

If that was the message two thousand years ago—that God commands all men everywhere to repent—what shall *we* say who are living *now*? Do we have the same sense of urgency that Paul knew? The early church was certainly not deceived into thinking that the Judge was 'at the door' and soon coming. For them the issue was not chronological, but expectation and urgency. If we are not living in this kind of dynamic, we are not the church in any true sense. This is intrinsic to any true, apostolic church, and to the degree that we do not have this sense of urgency and imminence of the things that are shortly to come to pass, then to that same degree we are not the church. Do we see this expectation as being the logic of our faith? Do we bring it to bear on our decisions? Do we plan our vacations, and where we are going next year, and the purchase of boats, as if these things are not shortly to come to pass? Do we betray, by our actual conduct, what we purport to believe?

The message of God has always been, "Repent and believe the gospel!" There is no way to believe the foolishness of the gospel by our intelligence. In God's intention, the gospel is beyond the ability of any man to understand. The natural man *cannot* perceive the things of God, for they are spiritual. Repenting is the key that gives the release to the supernatural grace, unobtainable through our own intellect. God commands all men everywhere to repent. Does our presence compel men? Does our speaking to men guarantee that they will be without excuse in the 'Day of Judgment'?

The Nations in the Light of Judgment

The nations are in rebellion against God, and their proliferation and increase in number is only one statement of it; their false gods are another, while their opposition to Israel is the most graphic expression of their rebellion. The Millennium, and the peace of the Millennium, pave the way for the nations to come into God's ordained formula, as it was from the beginning. Israel is at the center; the Law goes forth out of Zion. The nations come up to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles to pay respect to the God of Israel. That is how God intended it from the first, but He has first to deal with the rebellion in His own nation, whom He has chosen, and then with the nations who are in rebellion against Him. We have not understood the magnitude of man's rebellion against God, even though they have their monuments to the 'Unknown God.' Paul understood it, and he addressed it.

Our relationship and understanding of Israel, both as a nation and even as individuals, is the evidence of whether or not we have sought God and found Him. If we *say* we have

found God, then what have we learned about the nation Israel with regard to ourselves, not just as mere acknowledgment of that nation's centrality, but the actual and existential submission to that centrality? To have sought God, and found Him, is incompatible with being indifferent to Israel as His chosen and revealed center for all nations. Is it for the fear of such a discovery that God is *not* sought? Who wants to find Him if the revelation that comes with that discovery is injurious or threatening to our own self-interest?

We do not seek, because we do not *want* to be found. Our conduct and indifference speaks for itself. Our ignorance is willful, and the failure of nations historically to seek God has been unbelievably tragic for mankind. Wars, conflicts, devastation, and death have been the result of self-seeking, autonomous nations acting out of their ambition and rivalry for glory and fame, and who did not seek God for *His* purpose. The nations need to be told, which is not to say that they will listen, but if we know that judgment is coming, and we do not sound a warning, then their blood is on our hands. It is unlikely that governments will respond, but individuals hearing the message, and seeing our colossal faith and insistence upon it, will be stung in their hearts. Those who have treated the issue of God with a certain kind of casualness will now be alerted to something that for them will be salvation. This is the issue of the Last Days.

This is why the church, generally speaking, is anemic and weak. Its goals and purposes are so vain, and center in their own success and perpetuation, because it has not the apostolic setting. It has neither the overview, nor the cosmic context for which the church has been set in the earth, and no wonder that it is condemned to a vision of petty things. It is falling far beneath the glory of God, because it has not glimpsed the purpose of God.

> "For behold, I am beginning to work calamity in this city which is called by My name, and shall you be completely free from punishment? You will not be free from punishment; for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth," declares the Lord of hosts. "Therefore you shall prophesy against them all these words, and you shall say to them, 'The Lord will roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will roar mightily against His fold. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A clamor has come to the end of the earth, because the Lord has a controversy with the nations. He is entering into judgment with all flesh; as for the wicked, He has given them to the sword,' declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 25:29–31)

Judgment begins with the house of God, but it does not stop there. It will include "all the inhabitants of the earth."

The Day of the Lord, so central to the apostolic thinking and to the prophets, will be the epochal Day when the wrath of God will come in the time of God, and be released in a fury against the nations. It is not a twenty-four hour chronological period, but it will be a time of unspeakable devastation. That is why we read in Psalm 9 of the ruins to which the nations are brought. There are even suggestions that one third of the inhabitants of the earth will be obliterated.

At the end of history, God is preparing an apostolic entity in the earth, bearing the authority and message of Paul *to the nations* before the judgment promised by God falls. God cannot bring His judgment until the nations have heard the warning, and refused to regard it. The church has not performed this, and we have ourselves been so caught up at the individual level that we have not considered God's message *to the nations*. Paul was schooled in this, but we are not, nor do we like to hear about the judgments of God, and the Day of the Lord has no cogent meaning for us. We know it exists, and it has a familiar ring to it, but it is not central to our understanding. If it is not central, then we are not apostolic.

> And with many other words he (Peter) solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40)

Peter was addressing the individuals who had come up to Jerusalem for the high feast days, and his appeal to them was to be saved out of the judgment coming upon the nation. The Day of the Lord was at hand—the signs, the wonders in the sky, blood and fire, the sun being turned into darkness—that is what Peter preached. That which they were hearing in other tongues was what Joel promised when the Day of the Lord would come. "Be saved" is not salvation as we commonly understand it now. It was a salvation out of the judgment that is coming in wrath upon the nations, and *that* is the message of the Last Days. As it was at the first, so shall it be at the end. We have made salvation something much less and other than what God intended, and have missed the larger context of God's wrath exhibited toward the nations.

This message is completely at odds with the world as it sees itself. It does not perceive an end, or else they would not be building their skyscrapers. There is not even a *sense* of end or judgment. Yet we have got to communicate a reality that is completely at odds with what the world thinks is real. It must be communicated in such a way as to compel them to an acknowledgment of that reality so as to repent of the false reality, and to bow to the true *before* the fulfillment of that reality comes as judgment. To be able to convey that reality means that there has to be an imminent sense of God as Judge, and at the door, and a sense of God's wrath, by men who have opened themselves to some expression of that reality in their own lives. To omit God in His judgment is to dismiss God as God.

Do we really have a message for individuals if we have not a message for the nation? If we cannot confront the corporate sin, can we really confront the individual sin? The failure to identify sin as sin has made our evangelism so shallow, where the basis for the appeal is for the benefit one receives for believing. It goes back to the fact that we have not identified ourselves with the sins of our nations, because what is the sin of the nations but the same sin as individual men. Nothing will more enable men to see sin than in the context of the sins of *their* nation for which God holds them culpable and responsible. For example, the Germans are responsible for Hitler. The German nation is responsible for the sins of that nation. The people of a nation are accountable for the conduct of the nation, and God will judge them for the sins of their nation. We have not really had an effectual gospel to individuals because we have not shown them their sin in the context of

their nations. Far from the message of the gospel to the nations being an alternative to the gospel to individuals, it may well be *the key* of the gospel to individuals. Men have a difficulty in seeing their sin as sin. That is the nature of sin; it disguises itself as not being sin. But the conduct of nations is so blatant and conspicuous, but we need to see it as the statement of ourselves—for what is a nation, but the celebration of man. There is a way in which we as individuals rationalize our sin away, but we can more readily see it in the conduct of our nations, where it is clearly seen.

We have got to be to the nations what Paul was to Athens. History is waiting before judgment comes, and that is why Paul could say that God has appointed a Day in which He will judge the world: "If you Athenian philosophers and Stoics did not know it before, then you know it now because I am telling you. You who celebrated yourself and complimented yourself for your 'spirituality' to the Unknown God need to know that God is not impressed. He sees your heart, and you are a bunch of devious phonies, always seeking after the truth and never finding it. You want to hear some new thing, and that is why you are willing to give me a hearing, not because you really want to be instructed, but because you just want a novelty. You *want* to continue the posture of seeking *without* having to find."

Resurrection—The Power of Paul's Message

> "… having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

The whole of Paul's message, and the obligation of men in the hearing of it, rests on one thing only—the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah from the dead. What gave Paul the right to demand of his hearers an eternal accountability on the basis of a doctrine of Hebrew faith for which pagans had absolutely no awareness? How could he expect them to understand the concept of resurrection when Jews themselves rejected it? His hearers had no biblical framework even to begin to understand, and yet Paul holds them accountable, and puts them under every obligation to understand it *unto repentance*.

Of all the articles of faith, resurrection is the one most calculated to offend against human sensibility and intellectual respectability. Paul took the one thing most offensive to their credulity, and based everything on that. For him, it was not a viewpoint to be expressed only on Sunday in a religious environment, but totally relevant in the affairs of men in the world *now*. There is nothing more pertinent for secular men than the subject of God, and the truths of God, despite the offense it will bring to the hearers. The apostolic mindset, which is the definitive mind of God, brings the divine view, whether it is accepted or not.

Everything that came out of Paul was incarnate *in* him; it was the living word. Paul did not just proclaim the message of the gospel; he *was* the visible demonstration of it; he was the word made flesh. Those Athenians heard a convicting word, coming out of the mouth of one who is steeped in the reality of the things which he is proclaiming. That is what made him an apostle, and to reject *that* witness is to reject the finest of what God

can present to men; there is nothing more that God can do in His mercy—then shall the end come. They could only believe in the phenomenon of resurrection because Paul was *in* the resurrection. He was a man raised up out of death. His speech to the Athenians was itself a resurrection phenomenon, and not merely conceived in the religious mind of a man. It was God's very own statement given in God's very own power, and unless we, as the church, come to individuals or the governments of our nations in *that* power and identity, our attempts will be in vain.

> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (Acts 17:32–34)

Those who believed the message joined themselves *to Paul,* and believed. This is not a little chance expression; it is rich in all of its meaning. The hearers did not subscribe to some abstract gospel, they did not sign their name on the dotted line to a set of precepts. The point here is that you cannot separate the man from the message, for he was the thing in himself. He *was* the message, and not some abstract conveyor of a technical word of truth. There was something about the reality of his own life, something that exuded from his own spirit, which, in itself, was the demonstration. He was already a man in eternity, a citizen of heaven, and living already in the power of the age to come. It was a statement of his apostolic life, and it needs to be ours also.

Paul could have contradicted his message, even though he might have said all the right things. If the voice of his speaking, or the spirit in which it was spoken, lacked real conviction, and if he was living a life unto himself and for himself, as most Christians do, then they would have been completely unimpressed and unaffected. To believe the man is to believe the message, and to believe the message is to believe the man.

The resurrection from the dead is an absolutely supernatural phenomenon. It does not leave men any options, because it does not speak about the resurrection as a vagary; it is not a theory. Paul is speaking about an actual resurrection with an actual Man whom God has raised from the dead, and this same Man will judge all nations. It is utterly supernatural and utterly specific, and *that* combination is deadly to the secular mind. They do not want to be boxed in with something so specific as this, and that is why Jesus is a 'bone in the throat' of the modern world. It means that we can no longer construct gods of our own imagining, which men love to do. But if a specific God, who in the form of a man was raised from the dead, requires your allegiance to that Resurrected Man, who is going to be the Judge, then it does not leave you any options.

> "… having furnished proof to all men …"

This is not just referring to Jews, nor the witnesses in Jerusalem, but to *all* men by raising Him from the dead. The reality and the power of this resurrection had got to be demonstrated right there on Mars Hill to the Greeks. For if that resurrection is not

demonstrated through Paul himself, then it is only an abstract concept. Paul said that he had given proof to all men, because the very life that came out of Paul, and his speaking, were the very demonstration of a resurrected and ascended King, whose kingship, love and conviction were pouring out of that beggarly Hebrew vessel.

At the end of the age there are going to be two religious bodies, and the profound thing that separates the one from the other, and makes the one the enemy and the victim of the other, is the whole issue of the supernatural. The resurrection is eminently the issue of the supernatural. Men may squabble about the issue of virgin birth, but they cannot squabble about the issue of resurrection. It either *is* or it *is not*. It was the proof even for the unbelieving disciples of Jesus, who were *"slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had written."* Even when Jesus appeared to them in His resurrection body, it says that they did not believe unto joy. There is something so profoundly deep in our human nature that opposes the supernatural, that even when it is demonstrated in the person of Jesus Himself, there was unbelief. He ate before them in His resurrection body, yet their carnal minds, and the spirit of the world, were so opposed to the supernatural God that they staggered over the issue of the resurrection.

Even when we profess to believe, we do not really believe. The issue is not whether we believe technically to the correctness of the doctrine of resurrection, but do we believe to the point where we are living in the power of it? Are we willing to stand before men on Mars Hill, not on the basis of our cleverness or preparation or our ability, but His life? Is our life hidden with Christ in God? When *His* life is revealed, our life shall be revealed also with Him *unto glory*. For many years, I could not understand why there was such a painful absence of the glory of God upon the earth. There are many correct believers—moral, clean, giving no offense, living nicely prescribed lives and models of propriety—but where is the glory? The glory is only in the resurrection, and the life and power that comes when we are dead and hidden with Christ in God, *until* His life is revealed.

We cannot command, exploit, use or manipulate the resurrection life for *our* convenience. It embraces and apprehends us, and there will be times when the most glorious things will come from our mouths, statements you know that you are patently incapable of expressing. But there will be other times, in the purposes of God, where nothing will come, and you will just look like the fool, weak and powerless. You will be incapable of giving an answer, and likely become an object for the derision and reproach of men. You could have said something clever out of your own ability to get by, but you would have missed a moment for the glory of God.

Paul always preached ‘Jesus and the resurrection,’ which is Christ and Him Crucified. It was the supernatural faith, and basis for all of his dogma, practice and thought. There are so few believers who have attained to *this* faith, to this resurrection, to this reality and to this supernatural basis, which may be the reason why we do not proclaim it to men.

The Finality of Paul's Message

There is something about taking eternity into one's life in that kind of reality that brings an urgency to every human kind of deliberation. Those men will be without excuse. They not only heard, but were also encountered by the foretaste of the things to come and in which Paul was already living, and having his being. There is something about the bringing of the gospel in that kind of authority that compels men to decide *for* or *against* God; there cannot be indifference.

What are *our* foundations if they are not Paul's? Can we, with him, see the things that are invisible as being more impressive than the things that are temporal and seen? Athens was a mighty city, one of the great glories of the ancient world. Men quaked when they saw its glory for a first time. It took one's breath away, yet Paul walked right through it wholly unruffled. It was the world, which was passing away, but the Word of God endures forever. There was something about Paul that made him immune to the things that are in the world, the very things that make cowards and compromisers out of *us*. In one moment of time, they heard from a man who had no qualification or credential from their intellectual point of view, and furthermore, it was not offered as an opinion, but a conviction. Men have no obligation to hear our opinions, but they shall be held eternally responsible for our convictions.

Chapter 6 - Apostolic Character: Meekness

Apostolic meekness is that quality of character by which we shall be able to discern those who *"say they are apostles and are not."* One of the dangers of the Last Days is the presumptuous apostles who throw their weight around, and who seem to have a measure of authority and knowledge that seems to impress the undiscerning. There is, fortunately, one measure of authenticity that cannot be feigned or emulated, namely, *true* meekness. Meekness is not something one learns at school, but something attained by men and women under the hand of God, in union with Him, who is meekness. In other words, it can only be *given* out of a man's proximity with God, who Himself is meek and lowly of heart; there is no other way to obtain it.

Moses on the Mount

Moses, who wrote the five books of Moses, could say of himself, *"Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth."* It sounds like arrogance of spirit, but when a man can speak that of himself, knowing he cannot take to himself any acknowledgment for that condition, then we have an ultimate humility. It was God's grace that had brought him to that meekness. Humility is not something that man can work up by himself on the earth, and develop as a character trait. Humility is what God is in Himself, and the only one who will display and exhibit it, is that one who has been consistently in the presence of God's humility. It is humbling to be there, and that is why Moses could make that statement, not as a credit to himself, but to God, out of whose presence that humility was established.

The call to communion with God is never going to be convenient. There is a dying in order to find one's way into the place of the secret council of God, and one cannot enter it with the spirit of expediency. Expediency is contrary to God's Spirit and wisdom. God's call to Moses was to come up *unto Him*. It was not for any benefit Moses was going to receive—even spiritual benefit, but rather a seeking of God for His own sake, without any regard to the benefit accruing to the seeker by so doing.

It is interesting to note Moses' disposition on coming down from the Mount with the tablets of the Law. When he saw Israel dancing round the golden calf, he burned with indignation and anger, and threw down the tablets of the Law that were written by the finger of God Himself. He then commanded that the golden calf be granulated and ground to powder, and that the people Israel were to drink it. He made them drink their idol, and you do not hear a single complaint or whimper of opposition to that requirement. Evidently he came with such an authority that no one in any way took issue with that stipulation.

There is a conjunction between humility and authority. The first expression of Moses' humility was an expression of an authority of such a magnitude that no one questioned it. And then he asked who was going to be on the Lord's side, and the Levites came forward. They were told to put their swords on their side, and go into the camp, slaying all those who had gone whoring after false gods, including friends and relatives. What authority for the man who was the meekest in all the earth! It is only *because* he was the meekest that that authority was his, and the densest of souls recognized it, and could not, therefore, offer up a quibble of opposition. He was 'very God' in his indignation and authority, and his meekness was the statement, not of some affectation or superficial polish, but of a union with God in such a way that God's very own character was imparted to him.

Paul had a certain way of rapping the knuckles of the saints, more revealing of true fatherhood than we know. He would be unsparing in telling things the way they needed to be spoken. He upbraided, chastised, beseeched and pleaded. He did not flaunt his apostolic credentials, nor did he employ his authority to coerce. He entreated, "I entreat you as a father … I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present …." This is a distinctive character of the apostolic mindset and character. It does not employ its authority in any coercive way. The use of authority reveals us, and someone has said, "What we do with the weakest and the least is what we are." When a nation begins to oppress and persecute the weak and defenseless, it is revealing its true character. And the same thing is true in the church. We defer to the high and the mighty, whose tithes are impressive, but we give scant consideration to some average 'Joe' who has no distinction, and whose income is minimal.

Humility is Obedience

The issue of humility is paradoxical, because the apostle is so single-eyed, adamant, and utterly persuaded about the rightness of his word, that it appears as seeming arrogance. I suspect that the false apostle is self-defacing. He will *appear* humble, something like a 'salesman's humility' that is effected in order to sell the product. If we are going to be a discerning church, which is to say, an apostolic church, then the issue of authentic humility needs to come into our consciousness. The quality of true meekness, which Paul had, despite his uncompromising references to himself, seems to be so arrogant, and yet right *there* is the true meekness.

The Lord Himself was absolute, using language in such a fierce way. He acted in a way that seems to suggest anything *but* humility. For example, in overthrowing the moneychanger's tables, it would appear that, for that moment at least, He laid aside His meekness, and was acting now in another character. Was He meek even while He was violent and offensive? This act set in motion the things that eventuated in His death. So how do we reconcile the act of violence that Jesus performed as opposed to what we know of the meekness of God? When we think of meek, we think of mild, quiet and deferring. This is an aggressive and violent act, and yet we are saying that it is meek. If

we see meekness as total obedience to God, and all the more in an act, or a word, that would give an impression to the contrary, we will have a greater understanding of its reality. It may even make the obedient servant open to reproach for being violent, or being too zealous, or whatever it is. In other words, Jesus overthrew the moneychangers' tables as an act of humility, because He submitted to the will of the Father to obey in the moment that it was required, even though it was contrary to His own disposition or personality. He was a meek man, obeying the will of the Father, whose moment of judgment for that Temple had come, and it was performed with a total passion in His jealousy for the glory of God. True humility is reflected in true obedience.

There are instances where God will call us to obediences that seem to contradict meekness, and it would be arrogant *not* to obey, even by employing the excuse, "It is not my personality. It is not the way that I like to be, because I want the favor and the approval of men to see me as a nice guy, and therefore, I want always to be reasonable, quiet and diplomatic." Yes, you will be applauded for that, *but not in heaven*. In heaven, it is clear rebellion, because if God wanted you to be 'violent,' and you withheld because it contradicts your personality, or anything like that, you are putting something above and before God, namely, your own self-consideration.

A true apostle will not relent or refrain; he cannot be bought or enticed into being 'one of the boys,' and he shuns the distinctions and honors that men accord each other. He necessarily has to, or there would be a compromising of what he is in God. He is scrupulous in character, and will never use his position to obtain personal advantage. He is naturally unaffected, normal and unprepossessing in appearance and demeanor, despising what is showy, sensational or bizarre. He will not call any attention to himself by external attire. He is the thing in himself, in the very marrow of his being, because of his communion *with* God, and his history *in* God. Meekness is the characteristic sign of the authentic apostle, and also the quintessential character of God. On the basis of this, a false apostle, or a false bearer of God's word, can be identified as one who gives the impression of being self-sufficient, always in his dignity, or he affects something to make sure that you have noticed him for his distinctiveness.

Unselfconscious Humility

"The true character of the loveliness that tells for God is always unconscious," wrote Oswald Chambers. Self-conscious spirituality is where you examine yourself for an ostensibly good thing, even of a spiritual kind, but the very fact that you examine yourself ruins it. True spirituality is unselfconscious; it is *mindless* about itself. It is the very quality exhibited by Jesus, and though He knew who He was, and disputed with the doctors of the Law at the age of twelve, His whole earthly ministry had a remarkable quality of unselfconsciousness about it. He is not a man who went around making known to what ministry He was called. It is just a wonderful mindlessness, not in the sense of being irresponsible, but where you are not exalted in your own calling.

If we say, "Oh, I wonder, do you think God could use me? I wonder if I am of any use." Though it may sound modest and self-effacing in *our* ears, it is yet corruption. It still has our "I" at the center, and it is that very thing which taints the spiritual life. We need to come into that wonderful place of complete unselfconsciousness, where we are what we are by the grace of God. We do not ever think in terms of ourselves. We simply are, and in that condition, we are a blessing to God and others.

The Broken Alabaster Vial

There is an episode in the life of Jesus, hardly worth mentioning, you would think, and yet God includes it in three of the gospels in one form or the other.

> "And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her.
>
> But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish, you can do them good; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of in memory of her."
>
> And Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests, in order to betray Him to them. And they were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time. (Mark 14:3–11)

It is not a coincidence that there is a conjunction between this lavish outpouring, and the response to the Lord by Judas and the chief priests, whose betrayal was for the sake of convenience. Jesus said that what she had done would be spoken of in memory of her. That is rather exuberant praise and acknowledgment for what seems to men, and even to the disciples of Jesus a waste. Efficiency and utility are the spirit of our age, and says, if you invest, or give of something, you expect a payoff and recompense. But something that is given lavishly, without any thought of return, is costly. It made even the disciples to recoil in indignation and to murmur against this woman, and to say, "For what purpose was this waste. That expensive ointment could have been sold and the proceeds used to buy tracts and finance ministries, and done all those wonderfully helpful things." We need to dissuade believers away from the preeminent fascination for *ministry*. We are so ministerial-minded, and we want so to come into our ministries, and a lot of souls are

made shipwreck by a premature coming into ministry when there had been no attention to the foundation of relationship with God and men.

This woman came bearing an extraordinarily exquisite, alabaster vial. The remarkable thing is that there is no way to extract the ointment unless the container is broken. There was no screw-off cap that could be neatly screwed back on for the next time. It was either to break it in order to extract the contents, or the contents remained enclosed. That is a beautiful picture of ourselves, shaped at the hand of God, vials of expensive material, but however outwardly impressive we are in that sense, it will *not* make us significant to a dying world, and especially to a Jewish people. The thing that makes us significant is rather the fragrance of the knowledge of Him made manifest by us in every place. The savor of death unto death to those who would perish, and life unto life to those who would be saved.

We all have a particular 'flavor' and some of us have greater amounts of that substance than others do, and for some, the aroma and bouquet is exquisite, and for others rather ordinary. It depends very much upon what kind of history we have with God, and how deep we are identified with Him in His sufferings, His misunderstandings, His rejections, and all of the things that inhere in a true faith and a true walk. It is one thing to have that fragrance of Christ formed in us through identification with Him, and quite another to have the religion of convenience, which is also the religion of betrayal. If our Christianity costs nothing, and is convenient, we are already one with Judas. The faith is extraordinarily demanding, and that is why Jesus commended what the woman had done, and it was to be a memorial to her wherever *this* gospel is preached. The gospel is the gospel of extravagant abandonment and pouring out, or it is not a gospel of power.

Watchman Nee has said that the principle of waste is the principle of power, and we are powerless because we have played it 'close to the vest.' We have not given of ourselves the time, the patience, the misunderstanding, and the vulnerability of pouring ourselves out to each other that would make church the church. We are robbed, therefore, of the potential to form an apostolic body where men can be sent who can preach. We have opted for a religion of convenience, namely, no fuss, no stoop and no bother. That is why Jesus loved this woman, *"She has done a good deed to Me."* If there is any odious phrase to God, it is a work that *man* performs. He has no respect for the works of men, but He called what this woman did a good deed or work. She came with something very precious and expensive, and she came into a room full of men bristling with indignation, but she did not let that deter her. And wherever extravagance for Christ's sake is poured out, there will be a corresponding opposition.

There is something lacking in God's church, namely, a pouring out that releases the flow of His Life to the unbelieving world. We are antiseptic and correct, but we are not fragrant. We are not lavish with each other, afraid to take the risks of that kind of intensity of relationship by which alone true apostolic formation of character takes place. We are satisfied with a religion of convenience—a Sunday service and midweek Bible study, and then retreat again to our own privacy.

There is something about brokenness in God's sight that is so dear to Him. It was also exemplified in His own body at the Cross, and He is waiting for the same thing in His church, namely, a broken and contrite people who exude the fragrance of Christ. Something more than correctness and well-meaning intention is required. The meekness of brokenness comes when we come, and break, and pour. Meekness is the apostolic distinctive, the fragrance of the knowledge of Him, and every true work is an exercise in humiliation, suffering and death, and emits, therefore, the fragrance of God.

Meekness—The Key to Revelation

The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and a distinction of what is apostolic is the stewardship of the mysteries. The church itself should have this same disposition toward mystery, and the things that can only be revealed. The key to apostolic or prophetic seeing, and the receiving of the revelation of the mysteries of God is found in Ephesians 3:8,

> To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.

In other words, all true seeing is given to men like Paul, who see themselves as the 'very least of all saints.' Paul is not being deferential or polite, or making the kind of statement that a chamber of commerce speaker would make—he actually saw himself as this. He was the apostle to whom was afforded such magnitude of visions that God had to give him a thorn in his side, lest he be exalted beyond measure for the revelations that were given him. We must not, therefore, pass by apostolic character, which is to say, the deep humility, the authentic meekness and the Christ-likeness of the apostolic man.

We know that one of the deceptions of the Last Days is false apostles and false prophets. Even now, it is becoming popular where *everybody* seems to be a prophet today, or even an apostle. They are also quite clever as they have studied and know how to appropriate Paul's counsel and advice, and know when to apply it, and mediate over church issues, etc. Is that, however, the foundational man upon whom the church is built? If the man is the thing in himself, then it is more than his knowledge of church administration, or founding a fellowship. It is his very life; it is his character; it is his knowledge of God; it is what he communicates as one who comes to us out of God's own presence. This statement, 'the very least of all saints' is not Paul being self-deferring, but Paul's actual, stricken, heartfelt consciousness of how he sees himself before God.

It is a remarkable irony that the deeper we grow in the knowledge of God, the more we see ourselves as *less*. Instead of becoming more exalted by the increase of our knowledge of God, we see how abased and pitiful we really are. It is a contradiction and a paradox, only to be found in the church. Authentic meekness or humility is not something that one can learn, or pick up at school, or take to oneself, but the work of God out of a relationship with Him. It is the revelation of God as He is, and the depths of God, that

bring a man to this kind of awareness of his own self. The revelation of what we are is altogether related to the revelation of who God is. The two things always go together.

> Then I (Isaiah) said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.' (Isaiah 6:5)

This is the prince of prophets, Isaiah, speaking here. The foundation of the church is the revelation of God as He in fact is. *That* is the foundation. It is not as *we* think Him to be, which is more often than not a projection of the way we would *like* Him to be, especially when we have chosen to celebrate one attribute of God, and ignore another. The *key* knowledge is the knowledge of God as He is, and the foundational men to the church are those who can communicate God in *that* knowledge. Paul had this knowledge because he saw himself as the 'least of all saints.'

The Two Witnesses

> "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.
>
> And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.
>
> These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire." (Revelation 11:3–6)

These men will be dressed in sackcloth, clothed in humility, clothed in the meekness of God. Meekness, as we have said, cannot be learned. Any humility that is obtained through self-conscious determination is necessarily false. The humility of God is a prerequisite for the anointing oil of God, being able to 'shut up the sky' at our will, as we see fit. God can only commit such remarkable dimensions to those who are in authentic union with Him, and the evidence of which is their meekness and humility. The sackcloth is not an external thing, although I am sure it will be worn; it was rather a statement of an inward condition that cannot be effected, and cannot be a technique that we can learn by modulating our voices, or being self-effacing and self-deferring. Either it is, or it is not, and it if is, it will be in proportion to our union with God in the fellowship of His sufferings.

This is how we obtain and maintain a condition of humility, which is the *sine qua non*, that which is absolutely and essentially necessary for the overcoming and authentically

spiritual life. This is critical, because we are in a special place of jeopardy. I say ‘we’ especially to those of us who have a consciousness of being part of the remnant people of God. The very awareness that we are a remnant is the very same thing that can cultivate a place of pride and exclusivity. Jesus knew He was the Son of God, and that He was sent of the Father, and yet He walked through His life in such a selflessness and mindlessness about His own calling. Paul was like that too, and could say, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ. Follow me in all my ways, and if you do not, you are likely out of the faith," and yet there is no arrogance. It is an ultimate union with God, and it is something we need to be jealous for, or we will find ourselves entrapped and ensnared, not by our defects, but by our virtues. Our virtues can, in this sense, lead us into destruction, more so than our defects.

The gospel is always a call to humility. There is a deep pharisaic root in man that wants to predicate the privileges of God on the basis of merit or works. God goes out of His way to choose the foolish, the weak, and beggarly thing, in fact, all that is opposed and contrary to what *man* would have chosen. Part of our problem is that we do not understand how much God abhors what is in man. He simply would not entrust Himself to man, for He knew what was in man.

Blameless Consistency

> For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. (1Thessalonians 1:5)

There is a theme struck in that one verse, which needs to penetrate our deepest consciousness. Our modern life tends to be set in compartments: the secular and the sacred, everyday life and the religious, the private person and the public minister, and yet Paul did not know those distinctions. He was one true man through and through, the full-orbed man. The apostle is the thing in himself, the Word made flesh, and that is why Paul could continually offer *himself* as an example. He did not say, "Follow my principles!" but, "Follow me!" God does not say that it is the *principles* of the apostles and prophets that are the foundation of the church, but rather the men *in* themselves, and what they are *in* themselves *in* Christ. We are to be one true thing throughout, day in and day out. Paul was instant in season and out, always ready, always appropriate, before Jews and before Greeks, and God wants an entire church just like that.

This is very different from the ‘Lutheran’ lament, if I may be permitted to put it that way, which says, "I am only human … God knows I am only human … just a sinner being saved by grace." Perhaps now you can understand why there was a bloody conflict between the Lutheran Church and the Anabaptists of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries in Europe. This Anabaptist people could not tolerate that kind of unbelieving excuse, and found themselves martyred for their faith. It was not the world that opposed them so vehemently and viciously, but the established Church. They believed that one

should show forth the grace and testimony of a new life by the Spirit, as against a Church-State system by which everyone was inducted by virtue of infant baptism. In this system, most did not know the salvation of God at all, and who, in some nominal, religious way, called themselves Christian, and yet opposed the true faith and true church. They required the blood of the Anabaptists because they could not tolerate their *presence*; it was too convicting. Those precious saints showed forth the radiance of God, and they lived sacrificially, demanding to see the evidence of the new life in the believer before they would baptize them. They saw persecution and suffering for righteousness' sake as the logical and inevitable consequence of *true* believing. Can you imagine the clash that came with this kind of Church-State entity, the excuse for which was, "We are only human"? We need to come again into the Anabaptist's perspective, and know that there is a requirement for the demonstration of Christian character, without which our proclamation is valueless. Paul says,

> "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." (1Thessalonians 1:5)

There is an equation here: The power of the gospel in full conviction was in exact proportion to the quality, character and manner of men they proved to be among them. The authority and power that Paul exhibited was altogether in proportion to the kind of man *he* proved to be, and he says this to the church that was saved by his own witness.

There are false apostles everywhere, and you can identify them because they let you know they are apostles. They have a flair and a facility, and they can quote Scripture, and they can interpolate and quote Pauline things, and one could almost be impressed. They have such a manner, but it is not Paul's. Paul could say to the Thessalonians, *"just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."* In other words, in all seasons they knew Paul as the same, consistent thing, and this was altogether related to the word that came to them in power. There was no professional ministerial mystique in Paul by which he was something else privately.

There are only two ruling passions in an apostolic man, namely, "for your sake and for God's sake." It was never for *our* sake. Paul had no interest in himself, or for himself. These two considerations are the necessary requirements for an apostle, and therefore an apostolic church. The superstructure must be of the same kind as the foundation. In his farewell address to the elders in Ephesus, Paul said,

> "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;" (Acts 20:18b–19)

Regardless of his outward circumstances, there was a precious consistency of character. There is no place here for human moodiness, or a complaining spirit. This is something far beyond human good intention, and there is only one way to explain this kind of

consistency, as in Paul's own words: *"For to me, to live is Christ."* This is not a fanciful expression, a kind of apostolic extravagance, but Paul being quite literal. This is the *only* answer, and everything else is an invitation to catastrophe. We cannot seek to be apostolic, or true, on the basis of human determination by which we bite our lips, not knowing what we ought to be doing. We *will* fail, and we will fail wretchedly. We *must* find the mystery that Paul found, and it is just as available to us as it was to him, but we have not believed the Word, and we have not wanted to receive its meaning.

There is only one explanation for the phenomenon of Paul. His life was the very continuation of the crucified and resurrected Christ, who had found for Himself another body wholly yielded to His life. It was a Paul who had no life unto himself, or for himself, and who could say, *"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I."* Do you know why we have not stumbled on this stupefying requirement? It is because we have been content to live beneath the apostolic level. We have not felt this kind of requirement of character to be incumbent for us, and therefore we have been satisfied to be 'nice guys,' or our standard is a standard of 'Christian respectability,' and of being pleasant and polite. But I want to ask you a question: Is *our* gospel going forth in the power of the Spirit, and in full conviction? Paul says to these Thessalonians,

> "For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10)

For all of our innocuous evangelism today, and flashy evangelists, and 'decisions for Christ' that are made, of whom can it be said in today's proclamation of the gospel that pagans are turned from idols to serve the true and living God?

The power, however, in Paul's gospel and the conviction of it was sufficient to turn pagans from their idols to serve a living God. How many of us even have this as the criterion in our evangelistic work? Our standards have fallen wretchedly! We are content if men will only 'accept' Christ, and continue to attend Christian services, but no great requirement is made of them. Our evangelism has become a kind of 'statistical' game. How many have made decisions, and yet remain essentially 'pagans'? But Paul's gospel had another consequence; it turned men from their idols to serve the living God, which is more than merely attending services. Our whole standard needs to be elevated again to the apostolic level, for this alone is God's. And I want to reiterate my point: it will never be so, and our gospel will not have *full conviction* and *power* until we come to the place of apostolic selflessness, where we are wholly abandoned to the purposes of God. We are mindless about our security, our condition, and our pleasure. One can abound, or one can abate; it does not matter. Paul says in Acts 20:22–24a:

> "And now, behold, bound in the spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions

> await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself … "

Here we see the divine character wrought in a man, who was originally a persecutor and a murderer. It is going to require all of eternity to reveal the kindness of His grace toward us, not only in this age, but also in the ages to come. Paul did not consider his life of any account as dear to himself, and we shall never have the power and authority to turn men from their idols so long as *we* hold our lives as dear to *ourselves*. Paul was impervious to things, and we need to come into that apostolic condition.

In 1 Corinthians 7:29–32a Paul states:

> "But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be free from concern …"

The whole purpose of this apostolic exhortation is that we may attend upon the Lord without distraction, for the time is short! He said that almost two thousand years ago, but how many of us believe it now? They lived in the expectation of an apocalyptic conclusion, and we need to see restored an entire apostolic atmosphere, not the least of which is the sense of urgency and expectancy of an apocalyptic end. This cannot be for us an affectation, but a real urgency, to the point that there is an ‘electricity’ in our atmosphere. Our children need to be persuaded that what we are about is eminently real, and that we are not just ‘attending services.’

This will only come about if they do not see a different set of parents come home from the church as they saw *in* the church. I am not just talking about the atmosphere in our meetings, but the atmosphere that pervades the *totality* of our life together as an apostolic community. Are we anticipating continually the things that shall shortly come to pass? For that very reason, we must be indifferent to the various fads and fashions of our generation. The world’s fashions are going to pass away. Have we come to the place where we are not moved by things? Yes, we can handle them and use them, but they do not move us. We don’t all of a sudden collapse when they are removed from us.

As I have said before, we will never come to this apostolic standard by ourselves. The church is God’s provision for the strength, the prayer, and the support in breaking the powers of the world in the lives of believers who have the intention together of coming to this apostolic place where: *"I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself…."* We need each other to come to that emancipation, and it only comes through the *true* relationship which *true* church is.

I can remember well how it first was for me when we began in community. We gave up a seventeen-room house with five bathrooms to come to a rural property in Northern Minnesota in a whole radical alteration of our lifestyle. I saw someone behind the wheel of "my" car. I had thought that it was only a mode of transportation, but how much are we in self-deception and do not even know it! I experienced the shock of not only seeing another drive "my" car, but also *crunching* the gears! We have no idea, in ourselves, how much the world is with us. Community or life together is the provision of God, having the potential to break the powers of the world that are upon us. Do you remember how Paul said that he groaned in 'this earthly tent,' and how much he desired to be with the Lord? But for 'your sakes' he was willing to abide in this flesh. He was a heavenly man; nothing was dear unto himself, that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry that he had received of the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10 Paul states:

> "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers."

There is an extreme apostolic consciousness of God as *witness*, an awareness that before Him we are utterly transparent. God sees us in our public moments as well as our private moments. He sees us at all times, and our lives must be *consciously* lived in His sight. This is the only true motivation for blamelessness, and we shall never be blameless until we have it. The way we so often conduct ourselves privately and personally is a remarkable effrontery toward God. In most cases, it is really a statement to the fact that we do not believe that our lives are being lived in His sight!

It is amazing how much indulgence we allow ourselves. I am not just talking about the blatant sexual and sensual sins of fornication or masturbation—although those are sufficient to contradict our entire testimony, and to indicate to the principalities and powers of the air that we are not to be feared—but I am speaking about something even yet deeper than that. Paul speaks about having a conscience without offense toward God and toward men. Indulgence can take the form of continually thinking our own thoughts when we are *free* to think our own thoughts—critical thoughts, selfish thoughts, and resentful thoughts. They are *just* as ungodly as the act of fornication. The apostle is the thing in himself, through and through, the incarnate word of Truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Even in his private and personal thoughts, he is conscious of a God in whose sight he is utterly transparent.

"You are witnesses," Paul said, *"and so is God, how devotedly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers."* The apostolic requirement is far beyond the mere outward conduct; it requires the integrity of the total man— spirit, soul and body. Paul was truly a man who was bound in the Spirit, going toward Jerusalem, and it needs to be a description of us as well. I am not saying these things to bring us under any condemnation, but rather to show us how high the standard of excellence is that God calls *apostolic*. It must be so, for it is the standard that is the plumbline from heaven to earth. It is the ladder that connects heaven and earth, the standard for an unbelieving world,

against which all things are to be measured. That is apostolic, and it is God's intention for the church in every place.

The incentive, therefore, for holiness and blamelessness is always set in the consciousness of God as a Judge. That is why Paul could speak with full conviction to the Athenians, *"God has appointed a day in which he will judge all nations."* I can just see the cold chill coming up the spines of those unbelieving philosophers. They had never before heard such a concept. But it only requires one hearing when it comes from the lips of an apostolic man, who is not just merely speaking a technicality of doctrine, but who awesomely knows the Judge. That is why Paul says, "Knowing the terror of God, I persuade men." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. How is it that Paul knows it, and we do not? He knows it by relationship, and by the intimacy of His knowledge of God, and this is the deepest of all apostolic requirements.

The Yoke of the Lord

"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am meek and lowly," said Jesus. Are we *with* God, or are we freewheeling, independent agents who come and go as we please? Is our language, "Well, I think I'll attend this conference, or go to that college. I will see how I feel about coming to the meeting tonight"? If that is so, we have a greater regard for our lives than we think, and it will keep us from being *apostolic*.

We will never come to 'apostolic blamelessness' as long as we are self-conscious with each other. As long as we continue to live out our life in the standard that is established in our relationship *only* with each other, rather than as a life lived unto God, and an abiding in this divine standard, then we will fall short of His intention and glory. We are going to be required to stand alone often. We are going to suffer withering blasts of reproach and criticism, and if our praise and esteem is of men, we will not stand. But if our praise is of God, and we can wait for it, then we will stand, and stand apostolically! This dependency of looking toward men for confirmation, for support, for acceptance, and for approval, needs powerfully to be broken. There is only one thing that can break it, namely, the approbation and approval that comes only from God. If we have lived habitually in the light of the response of men, needing their approval, we will collapse. There is only one who can stand under such a blast, and that is a man who lives for one satisfaction only—the praise that is not of men, but of God.

We are not going to obtain this in a day, but we will not obtain it at all if we do not consciously see it as an object to be desired above all else. We need to see the necessity of moving from our present fear of men to the restoration of the fear of God. This must be our apostolic goal and mission for which we need the participation of everyone. We are *all* in this together. Can you see how extraordinary and necessary the requirement of true church is? It must be the one place in the earth where we do not have to put on any appearance, where we can frankly acknowledge our defects and imperfections and speak to one another the truth in love, and exhort one another *daily*. Next Sunday is already too

late. In fact, mere Sundays will never accomplish this. Exhorting one another daily while it is yet today means a radical alteration of our present lifestyle, and the establishing of a whole new set of priorities—apostolic priorities—that will make a serious intrusion upon our privacy, our pleasure, and our time.

Paul talks about being found blameless at His coming. He says that others may strive for a corruptible crown, but we for an incorruptible one. For Paul, this is absolutely vivid and real. For him, there is a shameful thing that cannot be considered, namely, that he should come before the Lord and not have a crown to lay at His feet. Do we have any desire to win a crown? The crown of glory shall not exceed the crown of our suffering! If we are unwilling for the crown of thorns, the trials, the demands, the reproaches, and the sufferings for righteousness' sake to learn what it means to live a heavenly life in an earth that is inhospitable, then we shall not have a crown to lay before Him.

The Lord Himself urges us to set our affections on the things 'above' where our treasure is. Heaven is not just biblical poetry, but the most practical and real exhortation to be blameless at His appearing. The words, *"Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect,"* ring in our ears. It is an absolute and apostolic standard much like being found blameless at His appearing, and if we will not insist upon that standard, then we quickly make 'allowances' for ourselves.

Do we have a conscience that is without offense to God and to men? What a condition to be in! It is nothing less than our re-entry into the Garden of Eden, a return to innocence. It is to be without guile, a light in the earth. It is God's invitation to us, not only in our outward conduct, but also in what we are inwardly and privately, even in the thoughts that we think, when we are free to think what we will. This requires a 'community' of the saints that is conducive to all these things. It requires a community that speaks the truth in love that it might grow up unto Him in all things. It is the end of passivity in the church, and a looking up to the platform while one man more or less conducts the whole service. We need to find and make room to speak face-to-face, not to the back of each other's heads, but seeing in each other's faces the glory of God, and moving from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of God.

God's provision for the perfecting of the saints are the *saints themselves* in *true* relationship, in interaction, in confrontation, in exhortation, and in speaking the truth in love. We must return to these daily church realities if we are to grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ. This kind of matrix of living will open our lives up, and place us under review as to just what we are about in God. It is a necessary review that has the potential to pave the way for true apostolic living.

This kind of sacramental living must be brought back into the church. We must be saved from mere expediency. It is not enough if something functions, or serves, or simply fulfills the utility and requirement of the hour. That may indeed satisfy the world's requirement, but not God's! The issue is not whether it functions. We need to see beyond utility and into the realm of glory, in things large and small. We need again to do all

things as unto the Lord, being steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and standing fast in the faith.

Conclusion

This is only a little gleaning from the vineyard of Paul—just a chance phrase here and there as it comes to us in the most superficial examination of his epistles, but what a standard begins to emerge! It is the apostolic standard that Paul himself walked in, and exhibited. *"Follow me, be imitators of me,"* needs to be said again by 'apostolic' men and women of our own age. God calls us to something even more frightening than that, namely, to be able to say with Jesus to an unbelieving world, *"If you see me, you have seen the Father. I and the Father are one."* If you want to know what God is like, then see this humility, see this uncompromising truth, see this integrity, see this righteousness, see this godly character, for this is the foundation of the church. Our power and authority in ministry are not something unrelated to it, but altogether divinely joined.

> "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake." (1 Thessalonians 1:5)

How many will subscribe to that standard from this day forth? If we are serious, we will find ourselves able to say with Paul, 'our' gospel, the gospel of His grace. It will no longer be a word of technicality, but a deeply experienced enablement for those who will be holy as He is holy, and perfect as He is perfect.

"You also became imitators of us and of the Lord." Paul is here intimating that to follow him was to follow the Lord. That is either arrogance or the simple truth in all humility. Apostolic is the Lord in all of the incarnate fullness occupying the human frame. Can you imagine a church like that, a whole church from top to bottom, in the same apostolic splendor, the same apostolic stature, the same apostolic character, the same apostolic witness, and the same apostolic power? That is what God is wanting.

Amen.